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# STARBURST

**X-MEN**  
APOCALYPSE

ALSO:

**DAREDEVIL**  
**DOCTOR WHO**  
**AGENT CARTER**  
**WARCRAFT: THE BEGINNING**  
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**ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS**

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**ISSUE**  
**424**

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We are...the bitter metallic taste in your mouth, the reason you wrenchingly horrific, eyeball assaulting, disgustingly inappropriate tasting, nightmare inflicting, agonizingly painful, disturbingly the hideous monstrosity, the wickedly heinous, the obnoxious, the immoral organ-busting, brain-boiling, fingernail-lifting, eye-gouging, shouldn't have been looking. We are wrath, envy, greed and gluttony. unspeakable panic and unquestionable fear, the uneasy feeling in undeniably hateful, never-ending evil. The ceaseless destruction addictively sinister, evil minded, perverse and spiteful. The lethal and skull slicing scalpels. The rusty iron hooks and wrist burning mankind. The serial killers and silent assassins. The shadow dwellers the ghosts and gremlins. The murderers and maniacs. The vampires un-dead punching from below. We say normal is boring, wicked is of the cursed and the secret cults of suburbia. The dystopian society of burnt hair and rotting flesh. The intoxicating fug of decomposing swarm of locusts. We are the reason you don't answer the phone, run say you'll be right back. We are lurking in the basement, hiding and the slow lingering creek in the floorboards. We are the reason shouldn't book, the game you shouldn't play and the squid you doctor playing God, stitching human to human to human. We are the The Satanic rituals to make the dead rise from their graves. The sacrifice gets louder and louder. The shudder up your spine and the chill in figure in the corner of your eye. The feeling that you're not alone, when despair takes hold and the faint glimmer of hope that suffocating feeling as the grave slowly fills. We are fearing nothing their way through your subconscious. We are the Argentos, Cravens. The Lees, the Cushings and Combs. We are exorcisms are the guts and the gore, the cannibals and savages. The found and Grindhouse, splatters and shockers. We are the voices from living. We are the cult classic and the now. We are the movement. We are the corruption of your innocence.

We are Horror.



stay up late and the reason you wake up screaming. The gut  
filthy force of nature. The most vile smelling, vomit inducing, putrid  
sadistic experience that you will ever encounter. The awful abomination,  
and downright disgraceful. The bone-snapping, skin-peeling,  
tongue-tearing, torture chamber that you found in a place you  
The deplorable, the loathsome, the despicable and distasteful. The  
the pit of your stomach. The reason your heart beats faster. The  
of all that is pure. The murderous, malevolent and malicious. The  
concoction of blood curdling poison, the chest crushing chainsaws,  
ropes. The lowlifes, the wrongdoers and the wretched disgraces to  
and the bottom feeders, the freaks, geeks, nerds and creeps. We are  
and vixens. The psychopaths down dark alleys and the hordes of  
wonderful, and strange is superb. We are the city of sin, the village  
, a desolate wasteland of the forgotten and unforgivable. The stench  
corpses. We are a plague of flies, an infestation of rats and a  
up the stairs or look under the bed. And whatever you do, don't  
in the cellar and living in the attic. The tap, tap, tap at the window pane  
you lock your door and check it twice. We are the hostel that you  
shouldn't eat. The suit gone psycho, the child possessed and the  
light, the shade and the darkness. The purgatory and the living hell.  
of a thousand screaming virgins. We are the howl in the night that  
your bones. We are the ringing in your ears, the threatening  
the shallow breath on the back of your neck. The paralysing grip  
is starting to fade. We are the final nail in the coffin and the  
worse than what awaits you here. We are the ugly thoughts worming  
the Fulcis and the Romero's. The Cronenbergs, Carpenters and  
and exploitation. The gothic, the revenge and the psychological. We  
footage, the frighteners, the hackers and slashers. We are ghost stories  
the grave and beyond; the army of darkness marching towards the  
are the thrill you crave. We are the insatiable desire for more. We



# CONTENTS



## FEATURES

### **NO MORE FALSE GODS** 12

We look forward to X-MEN: APOCALYPSE with an insightful preview.

### **DAZE OF FUTURE PAST AND PRESENT** 20

As a prelude to the upcoming film, we remind ourselves about what's happened in the previous movies.

### **THE EVOLUTION OF THE X-MEN: PART ONE** 24

An exhaustive look at the history of MARVEL's mutant heroes in the first instalment of an epic comic book retrospective.

### **ANIMATION X-CAPADES** 30

Professor X's team had arguably the greatest cartoon adaptation - but there were others, as we learn in this extensive trawl through the animated X-universe.

### **ENTER THE DANGER ROOM** 34

Find out all about the various video games that have been inspired by the Strangest Super-Heroes of All!

### **X-SELLS** 38

STARBURST takes a look at the mutant ensemble's best and oddest merchandise from over the years.

### **MUTANT X** 42

Remember this television oddity? No? Find out all about the not-quite X-MEN series...

### **RETURN TO UNDERLAND** 56

Join us as we take a trip with ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS and meet the weird and wonderful creations of Lewis Carroll once more.

### **GIMME SHELLTER** 60

Cowabunga! The TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES are back! And this time, they're coming OUT OF THE SHADOWS.

### **THE WORLDS OF WARCRAFT** 68

In anticipation of the upcoming movie, we trace the history of the popular game in its various incarnations.

### **FRANCESCA HAIG** 102

An exclusive chat with the best-selling author about THE MAP OF BONES, the second in THE FIRE SERMON trilogy.



60



**THINGS TO COME**..... 8

## BLUE BOX SECTION

**OUTSIDE THE BOX**..... 46

**WATCHING DOCTOR WHO**... 48

**FUTURE SOUNDS**..... 50

**REVIEWS**..... 52

**ALLONS-Y!**..... 53  
(THE TENTH DOCTOR RETURNS TO BIG FINISH)

**GIRL FROM PLANET X**.. 54

**HORROR OBSCURA**.... 63

**INDEPENDENTS DAY**... 73

**CINEMA**..... 78

**DVD & BLU-RAY**.... 82

**AUDIO**..... 90

**BOOKS**..... 96

**COMICS**..... 104

**ANIME**..... 109

**COSPLAY**..... 110

**GAMES**..... 113

**MERCHANDISE**... 124

**TV ZONE**..... 126

**IT'S ONLY A MOVIE**.... 129

**REGULARS**

30



56

# CONTENTS



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ISSUE  
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# EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 424!

I have always had a lot of time for The X-Men. The original comic book in the sixties was really odd in many ways compared to the rest of the line put out by Marvel Comics. It was a great way to get the message across to young people about tolerance for those that are not quite like ourselves. It got across the concepts of racism and prejudice at a time when comics rarely broached these thorny topics. The mutants were literally the outsiders of the Marvel Universe. Looked down upon and mistrusted. Allowing for many political storylines. Sadly, the original X-Men did not stay the course and went on to become the All New X-Men, and introduced the world to a gentleman with a bad attitude and claws to match.

It was to take several decades, and multiple advances in special effects before any realistic attempt at putting The X-Men on the big screen could stand any chance of succeeding. I was sceptical when production was announced on the first movie, yet whilst not quite mutants of my youth, **X-Men** in 2000 did a pretty good job of bringing them to life for a mainstream audience. It easily warranted a sequel, the superb **X-2**. A movie which I believe marked the point where the available effects were finally able to realise pretty much any super hero on the big screen. I mean, there was Nightcrawler going *bamf* right in front of my eyes! It was a defining movie that doesn't get the credit that it deserves in my opinion.

After **X-2**, opinion is fairly divided over the rest in the films, but it is admirable that the series never stays down for long, and we are about to meet a bad guy first introduced in the **X-Factor** comic book that semi-successfully reunited the original X-Men. **X-Men: Apocalypse** is upon us and **STARBURST** is here to bring you up to speed with the comic books, and movies so far. We intend to get you match fit, and up to speed. So dive in and get ready to meet Apocalypse...

Even with an impending Apocalypse, we still have managed to have a look at the upcoming **Alice Through the Looking Glass**, explore the worlds of **Warcraft**, and get to chat with cult British director Norman J. Warren about his classic horror movie **Satan's Slave**.

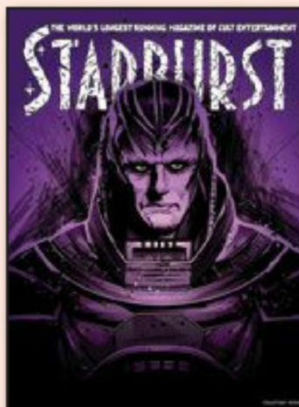
It's as usual packed to the brim and also featuring all of your regular columns, and favourites. Also check out **It's Only a Movie** this month as I get you ready for the **STARBURST International Film Festival**.

It is indeed a busy time in the world of **STARBURST**.

Keep watching the weird and wonderful,



  
Jordan Royce  
EDITOR



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## STAR

### HARD TARGET

Here they are: my 12 SW:TFA tickets: one scan, not 12 separate scans :-). I added a 1977 vintage Chewbacca figure which I found recently at a charity shop. I have a so-called Unlimited card at UGC Cinemas. For €18.90 a month holders of the card can see as many movies as many times they want. I rarely make use of this option (seeing movies multiple times), but in the case



of "Lucy" (11x), "Under the Skin" (5x), "Terminator: Genisys" (5x) and SW:TFA (12x) I did. I've had the card since 2003 but only since 2014 I started doing this, even though I've seen "The Matrix Reloaded" 3 times in the cinema.

Suggestion: an article on "Crossbow" AKA "William Tell": It's my #1 favourite series of the '80s, but it always remained somehow under the radar, overshadowed by "Robin of Sherwood", but it has a strong fanbase. The series was created by Anthony Horowitz. I've recently re-read his book (his version of the legend) on which the series was based.

*Kapreles Ren, via EMAIL*

**WOW! This scan is an interesting composition! We couldn't work out what the sleeping Chewbacca was about at first, and then we finally realised - CHEWBACCAS DOZEN! This really made us laugh! After this saga, you deserve to be the Star Letter, Kapreles!**

## LETTER

### LOVERS LANE

Is the title CLOVERFIELD used to describe a horror anthology series of films from Bad Robot productions, in the same way that THE TWILIGHT ZONE episodes weren't connected in any way other than the title of the series? If so, I hope it is the start of many. I really enjoyed 10 CLOVERFIELD LANE. It was a taught thriller with a superbly unhinged performance from John Goodman. The closing moments of the film were very enjoyable when it was revealed which of the various conspiracies was the real reason behind the attack. I also loved how we had heard nothing about the film until the release of the first trailer. I'm hoping for more great monster movies with the CLOVERFIELD monicker if the first two are anything to go by.  
*Keith Tudor, ROMSEY, HANTS*

### BADMAN RETURNS

Dear STARBURSTers, So, BATMAN V SUPERMAN happened. It seems like I'm in the majority here who hated it, but there are some foolish sorts who saw this as the greater superhero movie ever. Are they deluded or am I slowly losing the plot? Thanks,

*Gary Howells, via EMAIL*

**There have been a lot of contrasting opinions on the movie, but you can check out what we thought on page 80 in our CINEMA REVIEWS section, and in IT'S ONLY A MOVIE you can also read about the escapades our editors got up to at the premiere!**

### DRESS TO IMPRESS

I particularly enjoyed Fred and Ellen Reed's story in COSPLAY CATWALK (STARBURST

Issue 423). This is one of the first parts of your magazine which I always turn to as soon as I get my hands on it's lovely pages. I'm very glad you added this section to STARBURST, it makes an insightful read every month! I've been on the edge of the convention scene for a while now, and have only been dipping my toes into the cosplay scene, but reading this column gives me encouragement and ideas to do more myself. Maybe one day I'll submit something for your READERS COSPLAY :)

*Courtney, VIA EMAIL*

**Please do! We always wanted that column to shine a spotlight on the growing scene and help inspire people just like you. Not every cosplay has to be very complicated, you can start small, and build up to more elaborate costumes, it's all about having fun! Maybe try and talk a friend into also Cosplaying at an event with you, if you are a bit nervous!**

### YOU ASHWIN SOME, YOU LOSE SOME

I liked the article in the last issue regarding big events that were featured in Marvel comics. After reading the article I felt there is one event that has not been mentioned and that is Kang's invasion of Earth. This story featured in numerous crossover books and it featured a remarkable issue of the Avengers that never had dialogue because the makers decided to let the images do the talking.

*John Ashwin, VIA EMAIL*

**It's difficult to include everything from over so many years on a few pages!**

**It wasn't definitive, and a lot didn't make it into the article, unfortunately. Perhaps we will go into more depth on it may be featured in the future, so just Kang in there, mate.**

### PIN FAIL

Can you believe that another HELLRAISER is on the way? I can't and I don't want to! And with a new Pinhead too! Surely not! I loved the HELLRAISER feature you did a few months ago, but wondered whether you'll be covering this new movie? Whilst I'm sure you'd do a great job of making it sound at least a little appealing, part of me can't help but hope this latest attempt to milk a once-great franchise is ignored by all.  
*Brenda McCarthy, Caernarfon*

**I'm sure it will be covered! We're on pins and needles waiting to see if the movie will do the trick, or be a nasty prick!**

### WADING THROUGH SUPERHERO MOVIES

Hi guys, thanks for putting out such a great magazine. I absolutely loved the DEADPOOL issue (and the film itself!). How do you think that particular movie changes the landscape of superhero movies now? DEADPOOL seemed to be the perfect kick in the arse for a genre that threatened to have ran its course.

*Sam Barrett, via EMAIL*

**It made for a brilliant contrast to the serious Snyder-super-duper-poopier this month for sure! And interesting that they went the 18 rating route, and it still did great at the box office, so hopefully we will get more of the like.**



Winner: Chris Saunders. Head over to [www.starburstmagazine.com](http://www.starburstmagazine.com) to enter this month's caption contest.

STARBURST

NEXT ISSUE: 425 ON SALE FROM MAY 20TH



# THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE  
BEST (AND WORST)  
OF THIS MONTH'S  
MOVIE / TV NEWS



In his follow-up to 2013's **Evil Dead**, director Fede Alvarez tackles the home invasion subgenre as a group of pesky teens decide to break into the home of a blind man (**Avatar**'s Stephen Lang), but things don't go as smooth as they would hope. Early word from screenings at SXSW have been fairly positive, and we can find out if Alvarez can top the scares in his debut flick when **Don't Breathe** hits UK cinemas on August 26th.

## DC

Following his outing as the Caped Crusader, the future of Ben Affleck's Batman is an uncertain one. Make no mistake about it, there is a future for Affleck's Dark Knight – after all, he was one of the better parts of Zack Snyder's much-maligned **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice** [see our review page 80] – but the uncertainty surrounds how many outings Batfleck will get. This month, though, brought a little clarity on that front. The actor's agent, Patrick Whitesell, revealed that Affleck's current contract with Warner Bros has him only tied in for Snyder's two-part **Justice League** adventure rather than the rumoured new Batman trilogy of films. We do know, however, that Affleck has been working on a screenplay for one new Bat-flick with DC's Geoff Johns; a screenplay that the **Argo** star/director may well end up helming himself. Up next for Affleck's World's Greatest Detective is a small part in David

Ayer's **Suicide Squad** this August, before **Justice League: Part One** arrives in November 2017 and **Justice League: Part Two** in June 2019. In some pretty awesome news, we now know that one person present for those JLA outings will be J.K. Simmons, who put in a fantastic turn as J. Jonah Jameson in Sam Raimi's **Spider-Man** trilogy, as he's landed the role of Jim Gordon. By this point in the game, Gordon will have a working relationship of sorts with Affleck's Bats, with the Gordon character obviously then being a presence in any solo Batman movie(s) that should arrive.

In other DC movie news, the on-off long-gestated big screen Lobo outing is seemingly back 'on' as Warner Bros have brought in **Wonder Woman**'s Jason Fuchs to pen the script for a film focused on one of the coolest characters in all of comics. This isn't the first time that we've had hopes of a Lobo movie, though, for 2012 saw **San Andreas**' Brad Peyton signed on to direct just such a film. Since then, things stalled, people left the project and it's not even known if Peyton is still actually contracted to a Lobo movie, with him next moving on to direct a **San Andreas** sequel and an adaptation of classic video game **Rampage**. Regardless, it's believed that Fuchs' screenplay will completely ignore any previous drafts done for a Lobo tale. A badass intergalactic bounty hunter who speeds around on his gnarly motorcycle whilst breaking the fourth wall, the Czarnian native is certainly a prime candidate to be brought to the big screen seeing as how well **Deadpool** has done this year.

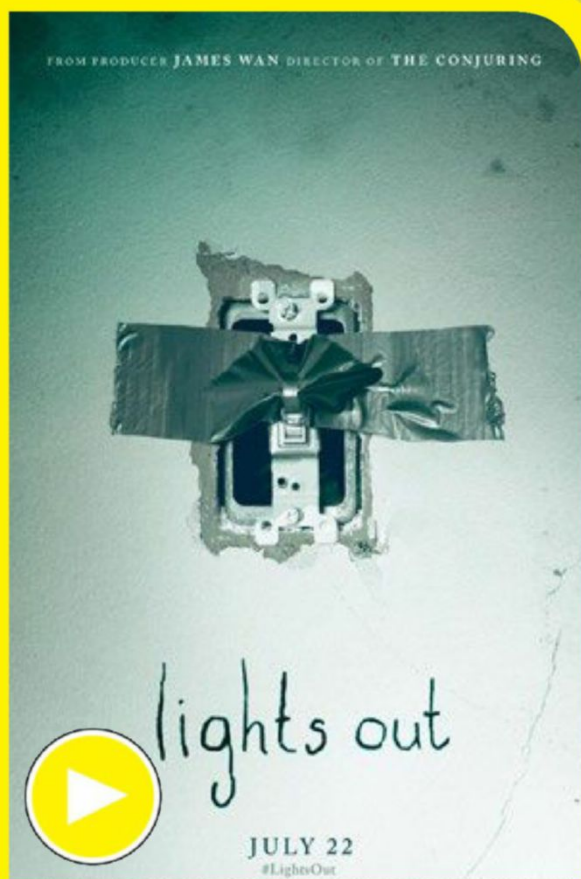
Elsewhere, a DC-based (well, DC's Vertigo imprint) property that is having a few issues is the longstanding adaptation of Neil Gaiman's **Sandman**. The problem this month is that Joseph Gordon-Levitt has departed the project. As well as being on board to star in the feature, JGL was also to direct. In some slightly worrying news for fans of Dream and the Endless, Gordon-Levitt put out a lengthy Facebook explanation that was highlighted by the line "I came to realise that the folks at New Line and I just don't see eye to eye on what makes **Sandman** special, and what a film adaptation could/should be." Quite damning, no? Regardless, New Line Cinema is still moving ahead with the project and have brought in Eric Heisserer to work on the film's script. His previous writing credits include genre efforts such as **Final Destination 5**, 2011's **The Thing**, and the **A Nightmare on Elm Street** redo.

Where DC's television properties are based, this past month has brought confirmation of plenty of renewals. The CW has confirmed that a fifth season for **Arrow**, a third season for **The Flash**, a second season for DC's **Legends of Tomorrow**, and a third season for **iZombie** (which is a take on the Vertigo imprint title of the same name), whilst FOX's **Gotham** will be back for Season Three. AP

## ANNIHILATION

Having worked together on the stunning **Ex Machina**, Oscar Isaac (**Star Wars: The Force Awakens**) is now on board with director Alex Garland's next project, **Annihilation**. Adapted from the novel by Jeff VanderMeer, Garland will join Natalie Portman, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Gina Rodriguez, and Tessa Thompson on the sci-fi thriller about a biologist on a terrifying expedition. It's the first novel in VanderMeer's **Southern Reach** trilogy, so Garland and co. will no doubt be looking for a franchise. Expect **Annihilation** sometime in 2017.





Continuing the trend (well, the off-on trend, at least) of adapting shorts into feature films, David Sandberg has expanded his (admittedly brilliant) viral hit from 2013 to full-length. A figure that only appears when the lights are turned out (hence the title) haunts a woman alone - at least that's what happened in the creepy and terrifying short, how well this is extended remains to be seen. **Lights Out** opens in the UK on August 19th.

## INDIANA JONES 5

After the surprise announcement last month that Harrison Ford and Steven Spielberg will be returning for a fifth outing for the adventurous archaeologist, David Koepp has been roped in (well, Indy uses a whip!) to write the screenplay. As well as working on **Jurassic Park** and **Spider-Man**, Koepp wrote the last outing, **Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull**, which wasn't particularly well-received by some fans. Whether this will be a torch-passing exercise (like the previous film should have been) or not remains to be seen, but Disney will be wanting to make the most of the property since taking over the Lucasfilm brand.

## STAR TREK

As this is a big year for the show, there's plenty of things to be excited about - not least **The Saucer Section**, our upcoming regular news and feature column. While the third of the rebooted movies **Star Trek Beyond** is released on July 22nd, the much-anticipated new TV series is gaining pace with pre-production. Although no firm decisions are expected to be made before the latter end of the year, horror icon Tony Todd has revealed that he is on a 'very short' casting list for the show.

With Bryan Fuller acting as showrunner, excitement is already mounting for the series' return to the small screen. If what he did with **Hannibal** is anything to go by, it's going to be something very special indeed.

**Star Trek: The Original Series** and **Deep Space Nine** are both currently screening on CBS Action in the UK. You can find the channel on Sky 148, Virgin 192, Freeview 64, and Freesat 137.



## MARVEL

With **Captain America: Civil War** now upon us, the attention of many is looking forward at what's up next in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. And one such 'up next' feature is James Gunn's **Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2**. On that front, this month brings some rumours on Sylvester Stallone's mystery **Guardians 2** role. The **Rocky** actor has been spotted on set in an outfit that's said to be very similar to the Judge Dredd one he donned back in the '90s. Early speculation suggested that Stallone could be playing a member of the Nova Corps., although it now appears that Sly will actually be a part of Yondu's Ravagers group this time around. Now whilst **Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2** is currently shooting, director Gunn has recently discussed the possibility of a third **Guardians** movie. He revealed that Marvel Studios has already approached him with the notion of a **Guardians 3**, although he's not sure if he'll end up doing the threequel or not. He remained non-committal on that front by maintaining that his only immediate concern is **Guardians 2**. At present, our familiar **Guardians** are set to return to the big screen on March 5th, 2017.

Sticking with the MCU, the upcoming new **Spider-Man** movie has brought in another new cast member in the form of **Shake It Up**'s Zendaya. The actress-cum-singer, formally known as Zendaya Maree Stoermer Coleman, has landed the role of Michelle. No details are known on just who Michelle is or what part she has to play in the wall-crawler's world, but the character is being described as one of the leads of Marvel Studios and Sony Pictures' new Spidey flick. That film will, of course, be headlined by Tom Holland's Webhead, who makes his MCU bow in **Captain America: Civil War**. To be directed by Jon Watts, this still-untitled **Spider-Man** effort is set for a July 7th, 2017 release.

Keeping with Spidey for a moment, remember the grand plans that Sony had for Marvel's greatest hero and his world before **The Amazing Spider-Man 2** left us all with a bad taste in our mouths and a hollow feeling in the pit of our stomachs? That was a time when Sony had already announced **The Amazing Spider-Man 3**, **The Amazing Spider-Man 4**, and spin-offs in the form of **The Sinister Six** and **Venom**. All of those films fell by the wayside when that particular franchise and world fell apart, but this month brings word that Sony has resurrected their plans for a **Venom**-focused movie. What's interesting here is that the movie will *not* be tied to the Marvel Cinematic Universe or Jon Watts' aforementioned Spidey movie. Palak Patel and Eric Fineman will be overseeing the film, with Avi Arad and Matt Tolmach on board as producers and Dante Harper on the screenplay.

Moving things over to 20th Century Fox's Marvel properties, and Doug Liman's **Gambit** has run into even more problems. Having been in development hell for an age, problems came up last year when star Channing Tatum nearly walked away from the project. Despite the **Magic Mike** actor deciding to stick around, director Rupert Wyatt then departed the project and left it directorless for a good few months until Liman came on board. The film was supposed to start shooting back in October of last year for an October 2016 release, but the start date was pushed back until March. That date has come and gone, and the latest on **Gambit** is that production will not start until the end of the year, with director Liman even deciding to shoot psychological thriller



# horrorchannel

## A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

### APRIL 22ND - WAZ (2007)

Stellan Skarsgård (**Thor**) and Melissa George (**30 Days of Night**) star in this engaging thriller about a serial killer who makes his victims choose whether they or their beloved dies. His calling card is an equation carved into their bodies. The ever-popular Tom Hardy also appears, so there's some eye candy for the ladies.

+++

### APRIL 24TH - PRINCE OF DARKNESS (1987)

A John Carpenter film that's often overlooked, but well worth anyone's time. Donald Pleasence is brilliant as always as a priest seeking the help of a research team when he discovers a secret tomb containing pure evil in his church. Keep an eye open for rocker Alice Cooper as a sinister hobo.

+++

### APRIL 25TH - ATTACK OF THE 50FT WOMAN (1993)

A remake of the '50s classic, this star-studded run through is played more for laughs than shocks (hence the afternoon screening), but still worth a look. Daryl Hannah (**Kill Bill**) and Daniel Baldwin (**John Carpenter's Vampires**) headline, and the brilliant Christopher Guest - best known as Nigel Tufnel in **Spinal Tap**, but also behind a whole host of spoof documentaries - directs.

+++

### MAY 3RD - AN AMERICAN HAUNTING (2005)

Two heavyweight leads - Donald Sutherland (**Don't Look Now**) and Sissy Spacek (**Carrie**) add gravitas to this 19th century-set possession flick. Allegedly based on a true story (the Bell Witch Haunting), it's a creepy and entertaining diversion from the director of **Dungeons & Dragons**, Courtney Solomon.

+++

### MAY 14TH - BOOK OF BLOOD (2009)

Clive Barker's short story gets the big-screen treatment as a psychic and medium investigate a haunted house. **Game of Thrones'** Clive Russell stars, but **Hellraiser's** Cenobites Simon Bamford and Doug Bradley also appear.

+++

During the day, there's a chance to catch some classic series as they begin re-runs from the very beginning. The 1966 series **The Invaders** returns so fans can follow the adventures of David Vincent (Roy Thinnes) as he tries to warn the world about aliens amongst us. Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno play the different incarnations of **The Incredible Hulk**, as the 1978 series re-launches, as does the action/adventure series **The Lost World**, based on the tales of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

**Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freesat 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.**

**The Wall** for Amazon Studios as his next feature due to **Gambit's** delays. The problem for the movie now is that **Magic Mike's** Reid Carolin is working on further re-writes of the screenplay. Could it be that Fox have seen how well **Deadpool** has done for them and are maybe looking to switch up their **Gambit** tale a little? It could well be. For now, though, Tatum's Remy LeBeau is on hold for the foreseeable future.

Now while **Gambit** is having problems, one X-Men-based project that is moving forward is **New Mutants**. With **The Fault in Our Stars'** Josh Boone to direct, the film is believed to have added **Game of Thrones'** Maisie Williams and **The Witch's** Anya Taylor-Joy to its ranks. Williams will play Wolfsbane, a Scottish mutant with the ability to turn into an actual wolf, whilst Taylor-Joy will be playing Magik, a sorcerer with the power to teleport and who is the sister of the X-Men's Colossus. Additionally, Alexandra Shipp, who will debut in **X-Men: Apocalypse**, is expected to continue in her role of Storm for the movie, with James McAvoy's Professor X another with a key part to play in **New Mutants**. As well as these characters, the film will also feature Cannonball and Mirage, with

Adan Canto likely to reprise his role as Sunspot from **X-Men: Days of Future Past**.

Taking things down to the small screen, following on from the unconfirmed news last month, this month has seen Marvel and Netflix confirm that, yes, **Game of Thrones'** Finn Jones will be headlining **Marvel's Iron Fist**. As well as his own series, Danny Rand/Iron Fist will also be a part of **The Defenders**, the upcoming miniseries that will see Jones' Rand join Charlie Cox's Daredevil, Krysten Ritter's Jessica Jones, and Mike Colter's Luke Cage. **Marvel's Iron Fist** will head to Netflix in the second half of next year. Additionally, **Marvel's Luke Cage**, which sees Colter reprise the role he took on in **Marvel's Jessica Jones**, has this month been confirmed to hit the on-demand service later this year on September 30th.

In some interesting Marvel TV news, producers Chris Leek and Eleni Larchanidou have revealed that they're working on a pitch to take to Marvel that revolves around bringing Captain Britain to life. The current hope is that just such a show will happen in 2017, although things are at the very early stages right now, with the producers currently putting together a highlight reel. Having first appeared in 1976, created by the legendary pair Chris Claremont and Herb Trimpe, Brian Braddock/Captain Britain was the UK's answer to Captain America. The scion of an aristocratic family from Essex who is gifted the Amulet of Right by Merlyn, imbued with superhuman powers to defend the laws of Britain, Captain Britain would often come up against S.T.R.I.K.E. and eventually went on to lead Excalibur, the UK equivalent of the X-Men.

Now whilst Captain Britain could eventually get his own TV series, one person who's also keen to get their own Marvel show is Jeremy Renner. The Hawkeye actor has talked about how he'd like to get in on the act where the small screen is concerned, with him a big fan of the Marvel/Netflix model that we've seen work so wonderfully so far. Whether anything comes of Renner's wish, though, we'll have to wait and see. Considering that Hawkeye has been the member of the Avengers who's been the most short-changed so far, a ten or thirteen-episode season could be a fantastic way to explore Clint Barton in detail that does the character justice.

In some final Marvel-based TV news, FX's upcoming X-Men-centric show **Legion** has added **The League's** Katie Aselton to play Amy, the positive-thinking brother of the show's lead character, David Heller. **Legion** will centre on David, played by **The Guest's** Dan Stevens, a young man diagnosed as being schizophrenic but who soon begins to realise that maybe the voices in his head aren't quite as imaginary as some would have him believe. In the comic book realm, David is revealed to be the son of Charles Xavier. In addition to Dan Stevens, the show will also feature Aubrey Plaza, Jean Smart, and Rachel Keller. **Fargo's** Noah Hawley is writing the pilot for the show and will serve as an executive producer alongside Lauren Shuler Donner, Bryan Singer, Simon Kinberg, Jeph Loeb, Jim Chory, and John Cameron. <sup>AP</sup>

## AND FINALLY...

The latest attempt to adapt the classic **Dungeons & Dragons** property has landed a director as it appears Rob Letterman (**Goosebumps**) will be helming the big screen feature. His previous credits include **Gulliver's Travels**, **Monsters vs. Aliens** and **Shark Tale**. This latest telling of **Dungeons & Dragons** already has a script in place by **Wrath of the Titans'** David Leslie Johnson. No cast members have been announced at this stage, although the producers are supposedly looking for a 'Vin Diesel-type' to lead the film... whilst Diesel himself is a confirmed huge fan of **D&D**.

+++

Golden Globe winner Robin Wright has apparently signed on for **Blade Runner 2**. The sequel is scheduled to begin shooting in July under the direction of **Sicario's** Denis Villeneuve and will star Harrison Ford - returning as Rick Deckard - and **Drive's** Ryan Gosling, and is currently slated for a January 2018.

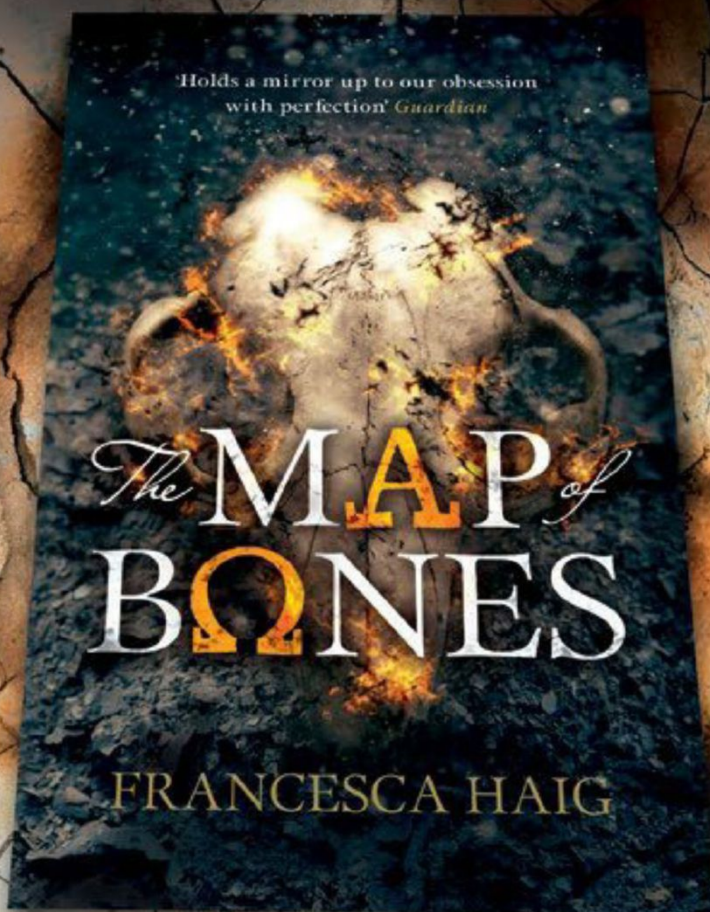
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Just because they won't leave things alone, John Carpenter's 1983 sci-fi classic **Stamman** is getting the remake treatment. **Real Steel's** Shawn Levy will direct and co-produce (alongside original producer Michael Douglas) the new version for Columbia Pictures. Arash Amel (**Erased**) has been tasked with handling the script.

TTC 424 stories by Martin Unsworth, Andrew Pollard. Edited by Martin Unsworth



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# NO MORE FALSE GODS

by Chris Haydon

*The third movie in each X-MEN cycle forever feels the need to go for broke. The first time around, THE LAST STAND took on the mammoth task of coherently telling the Phoenix Saga, and entirely botched it in the process. In 2016, the franchise is attempting to tackle the biggest, baddest, and boldest mutant of them all: APOCALYPSE.*





**A**fter locking horns with Magneto over the years, and finally coming face to face with Bolivar Trask and his dastardly Sentinels in *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, the mutants are now ready to battle the foe that we got a first look at in the post-credits sequence back in 2014. That brief moment, which showed Apocalypse using his powers to manipulate the Great Pyramids in Ancient Egypt, was included to suggest that this mutant has been around for a very long time... and at one point in time, he was viewed to be a god.

So who exactly is Apocalypse? The Marvel Comics Database reveals that his given name, En Sabah Nur, translates as 'The First One' - a fitting name given that Apocalypse was the first mutant in existence. He was born with grey skin and blue traces around his features, and had powerful gifts from the time of his birth. Apocalypse's various powers include flight, invulnerability, superhuman strength, teleportation, and telekinesis. His roots trace back to Ancient Egypt (hence, the setting of the *Days of Future Past* clip), and his difficult lifespan included bouts of enslavement, and fierce battles for power. Along the way, he typically enlists four mutants to serve as his loyal minions - called the Four Horsemen: Pestilence, Famine, War, and Death.

If fans of the Marvel heroes have awaited a single character to be developed for the silver screen, it is he. We all craved that Gambit movie, and past whispers of

## APOCALYPTIC VIEWS



*"It's nice to finally adopt that iconic look and pay homage to everything that made all these movies possible whilst also trying to give it something different each time as well."*

**James McAvoy on the bald Professor X**



*"He's kind of a guy that plays both sides. As always with Magneto, his motives are in some ways justifiable. It's his methods that are more questionable."*

**Michael Fassbender on Magneto's place in the film**



*"For me personally, I grew up watching the cartoon and he's the guy I loved in the cartoon, and now I get to pretend to be him, so it's cool as shit."*

**Nicholas Hoult on Beast**







*"He's definitely not going to be everyone's favorite version of Apocalypse, but he's my favorite version of Apocalypse. It's something from the '80s mixed in with something new. In this one, Bryan Singer and Simon Kinberg took the inspiration from many different sources, many different versions of Apocalypse throughout the ages and found the one that we thought was the most interesting."*

**Oscar Isaac on Apocalypse**



*"It's not leading necessarily toward exactly where we found Patrick Stewart and the X-Men at the beginning of **X-Men 1**. There are some things that led in that general direction that was part of the philosophy we had at the end of **Days of Future Past** is that you can't fully change the course or current of the river, but you can just divert it a little bit, and we diverted it a little bit. So some things will be surprises; people could die that were alive in **X-Men 1**, **2** and **3**, or people could survive that died during **1**, **2** and **3**."*

**Bryan Singer on the timeline stuff**



*"Can we top it? They did such a fucking awesome job. The special effects team is amazing. Bryan Schmears over at **Second Unit**, everybody just made that whole sequence awesome, I thought. I was just a minion. They just told me what to do so I didn't really have much to do with it but I was curious to see how they were going to top it and if they could and I think they have. I'm very excited to see it myself. I'm excited for everybody to see it because we've been working hard on it."*

**Evan Peters on topping Days of Future Past's awesome Quicksilver scene**



*"I get so excited to put on the suit and to train and to do my sword training and the stunts. It's the coolest thing."*

**Olivia Munn on Psylocke**

a Magneto origins story were tempting, but it is the establishing villain who has been long overdue the blockbuster introduction. And he arrives in a year where the comic book movie rulebook has seemingly been rewritten.

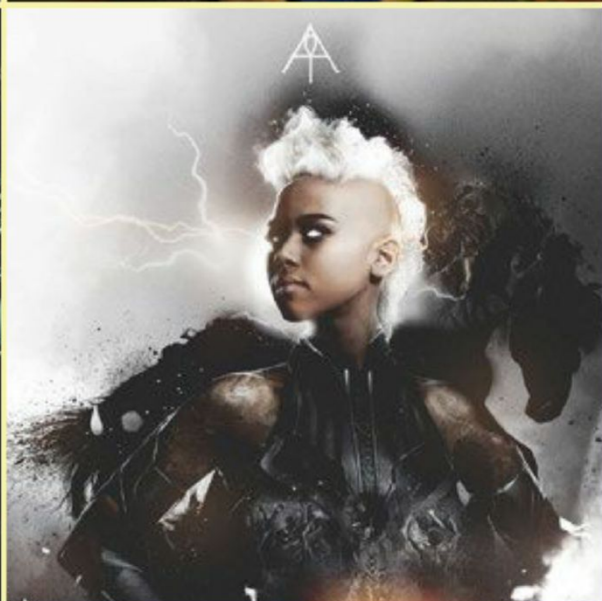
For starters, 20th Century Fox's division of the Marvel unit have opened one of their primary assets - Spider-Man - over to Marvel Studios, where Kevin Feige and Anthony and Joe Russo have placed him rightfully amidst the forthcoming carnage in *Captain America: Civil War*. Meanwhile, over at DC and Warner Bros, a similar picture is being painted. Titanic heroes attempted to destroy one another in Zack Snyder's *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, whilst resident foes of Gotham and neighbouring communities are banded together in David Ayer's *Suicide Squad* to defeat something or someone worse than they. Worse than a group consisting of the most depraved, psychologically warped bad guys across the entire universe...

In fact, Bryan Singer's fifth entry in the multi-time-spanning saga is perhaps the most traditionally structured superhero movie of the year. Well, in so far as the goodies must take on the baddies. From there onwards, things become exceptionally more complicated. Singer's previous *Days of Future Past* spent a large period of time tearing pages from Brett Ratner's shambolic *The Last Stand*; retelling his story whilst rendering new avenues for our original heroes (as in the X-Men of the 2000s), and paving the way densely for the reimagined young mutants (as in *X-Men: First Class* et al).

*Days of Future Past* was a roaring success, both critically and financially. Taking near \$800 million at the box office, it instilled a new level of faith in a franchise that has always seemed somewhat secondary to its bigger brothers riding the MCU. Ironic, really, as the X-Men have always been a fraternity of characters entirely dear to millions of people's hearts across the globe, yet their contractual ties to 20th Century Fox have been more of a curse than a blessing. Even now, where the anticipations levels begin to crank as we welcome the dawn of Apocalypse, the heavy shadow of Captain America and Iron Man going-head-to-head lingers.

Titles like *Captain America: Civil War* or *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* feel like 'event movies'. They have garnered a profile that separates them from the herd because they are toying with a tried-and-tested formula. Breaking from a supposed discipline will always give them an edge over any film deemed more 'original' for lack of a better word. They also smartly









*"I relate to him a little bit. He's had a bit of an emotional upbringing dealing with his mutant aspects, as all mutants do. But he finds himself and owns himself, and he has a great stance with his faith and he's also extremely happy all the time. And I think that's why his fans relate to him."*

**Kodi Smit-McPhee on Nightcrawler**



*"It's been pretty epic. With Storm, she comes into this and is kind of lost. She doesn't know who she is or how powerful she can be. She meets Apocalypse, who represents what a lot of people are looking for - a God. She's just finding her way, and hopefully, she can find her way to the X-Mansion."*

**Alexandra Shipp on Storm**



*"I felt a lot of responsibility. Famke [Janssen] portrayed Jean so beautifully. For Jean, it's exciting because I get a whole new perspective on her in the way that the last time we saw her she was a Grade 5 mutant, powerful, and it's exciting to be able to figure out how she got this way and how this alienated girl becomes one of the most powerful mutants in X-Men history."*

**Sophie Turner on Jean Grey**



*"Jubilee, to me, is the cool girl that I don't think I'll ever probably be. She has a sick sense of fashion and an amazing jacket. She's just cool."*

**Lana Condor on Jubilee**



*"She's very complex, so she's kind of both. She's a hero to her own race, in a way, which makes her a villain to the opposite race. I don't really know where she's going to go. She basically has to be in hiding somewhere, but I don't know."*

**Jennifer Lawrence on Mystique's place in the world**

bypass traditional trilogy formulas too.

Technically, *Civil War* is the third instalment in the Captain America franchise of the MCU, but it is being used as more of a launch pad for the *Avengers: Infinity War* entries, later in 2018 and 2019. Plus, it isn't really a Captain America movie in the traditional sense, either; it's more of a mapping piece for a variety of famous Marvel faces. It's a similar story with *Dawn of Justice* too; that's supposedly the sequel to Snyder's 2013 *Man of Steel*, but it isn't really - rather a springboard for the upcoming Justice League event which will follow in the footsteps of Feige and Disney's Marvel Studios.

Meanwhile, a film like *X-Men: Apocalypse*, one actually rounding a trilogy correctly, could potentially be opening itself up to vulnerability. Whenever people debate about their favourite threesome of movies, they will always be one that slightly lets the side down (apart from the current *Toy Story* franchise; we'll see whether the fourth alters that...), and the reason behind this is the second film - usually deemed the best. The structure of a trilogy is vastly unfair to the final act because of the predecessor.

All second movies - even the planet's beloved *The Dark Knight* - leave heavy baggage for the concluding film to gather; loose ends that must be straightened and tied elegantly with a bow. The first film spends time building character, developing relationships, paving the way for progressive story. Then, the second movie comes in (*Days of Future Past*, *The Dark Knight*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* etc.) and can fundamentally do whatever it likes. It may drum in tune to some developed narrative beats, or bring in some additional faces, but the runtime is there for the taking, leaving all the tidying up to the youngest sibling. And that's where things go wrong. *The Last Stand* and *The Dark Knight Rises* are glaring examples of this philosophy.

However, all hope should not be lost before *Apocalypse* has even awoken. For starters, this is Bryan Singer we are talking about: the X-Men auteur whose vision has provided these characters and global audiences with some of their finest, most memorable moments. He'll also be reuniting with long-term cinematographer Newton Thomas Sigel, and equally established composer/editor John Ottman. The pair have worked with Singer on every project since *The Usual Suspects* back in 1995.

Plus Singer and his production crew have an exceptional eye for quality casting; really enabling the colours of Stan Lee's panels to lift from the pages and into the actors. It is common practice for



superhero movies to offer an expansive range of remarkable talents these days. In fact, you are unlikely to see one that doesn't contain at least a single Academy Award nominee or winner. Comic book adaptations are the 'money fight' to quote boxing terminology, and *X-Men: Apocalypse* comes out swinging.

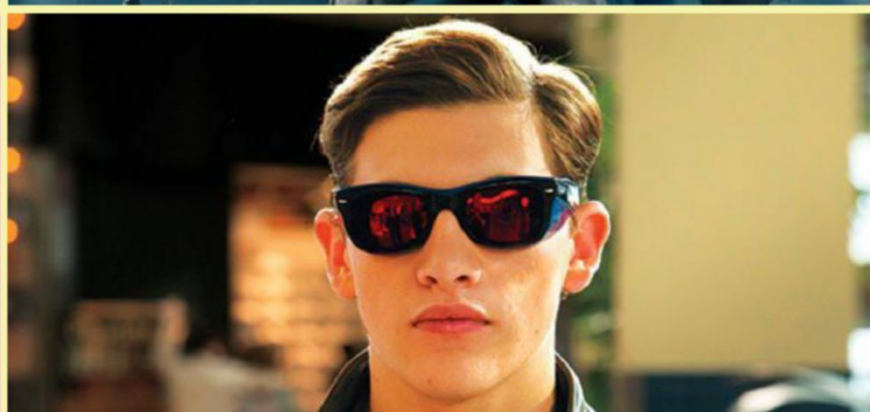
The sprawling ensemble cast on offer here sees the return of James McAvoy's Charles Xavier/Professor X and Michael Fassbender's Erik Lehnsherr/Magneto, alongside Jennifer Lawrence (Raven Darkholme/Mystique), Nicholas Hoult (Hank McCoy/Beast), Rose Byrne (Moirra MacTaggart), Lucas Till (Alex Summers/Havok) and Even Peters' scene-stealing Peter Maximoff/Quicksilver.

New faces on the mutant scene include Tye Sheridan as Scott Summers/Cyclops and *Game of Thrones*' Sophie Turner as Jean Grey, whilst Kodi Smit-McPhee takes on Kurt Wagner/Nightcrawler, Ben Hardy occupies Warren Worthington III/Angel, Alexandra Shipp braves it as Ororo Munroe/Storm, and Olivia Munn tackles the eagerly-awaited Elizabeth Braddock/Psylocke.

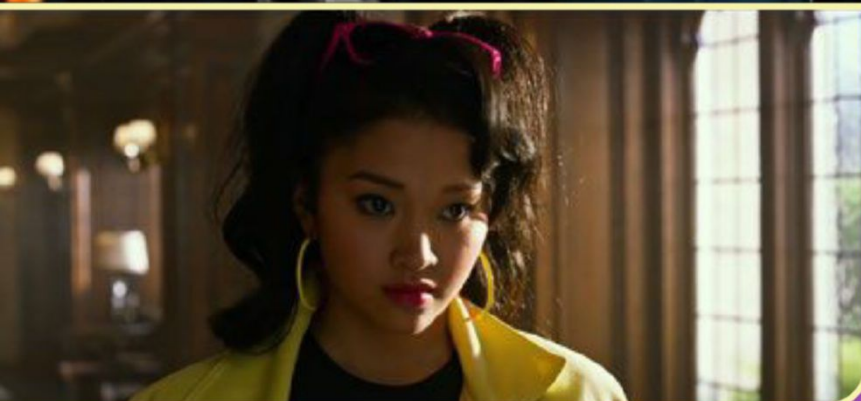
And then there's the big man himself. The casting directors really dug deep for the principal nemesis of the X-Men universe and cast the great Oscar Isaac in the role. Fresh off the world record-breaking success of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, the actor has rapidly become a household name for many, and a clear fan favourite as Poe Dameron in J. J. Abrams' picture, so he will be an enormous driving force behind this title.

An almighty challenge Singer's latest will have to overcome is stitching all of these characters together coherently, as well as gathering the scraps left from his 2014 outing; and there were a lot of scraps indeed. Plus, with the arrival of new versions of previously muffed characters like Cyclops, Psylocke and Angel, a portion of the runtime will have to be committed to realising them for new audiences, and establishing their primary relationships in accordance with comic book lore; something Singer is vastly passionate about.

Potentially, there is at least three romantic storylines to adhere to in *X-Men: Apocalypse* also. We have Mystique and Beast, Xavier and Moira MacTaggart, and now the revitalised Jean Grey and Cyclops - one of the most deep-seeded connections in the franchise. Not to mention a variety of crossing personal attachments that deserve to be explored, such as Cyclops and Havok's brotherhood and the origin of Nightcrawler - the biological son of Mystique and Azazel (of *First Class* fame).







So, what do we know of the story at current, then? Well, not a great deal, in truth. *Days of Future Past* took place in the early 1970s and *X-Men: Apocalypse* opens its storytelling 10 years later. Writer and producer Simon Kinberg has confirmed that the scene specifically takes place in 1983.

Now the existence of mutants has become common knowledge to the people of the earth (thanks, Peter Dinklage...), society is quite rightly conflicted. An array of citizens holds them as holy figures; gods we should worship.

It is this biblical appreciation that awakes the titular villain from thousands of years of slumber. Apocalypse, the first mutant, is an immortal, invincible being helmed from Ancient Egypt who fittingly possesses God-like powers. Prayer brings him from hibernation and he decides to employ his Four Horsemen (Magneto, Psylocke, Storm, and Angel) to assist him in developing a New World Order. This decision will see the cleansing and eradication of humanity as a whole and the rebirth of the mutant race. Charles Xavier, Raven, and their array of young mutants must flee the Academy and prevent global destruction at the hands of infinite power.

Scriptwriter Kinberg has always been cryptic. One who aims to keep things under wraps, and that is a quality worthy of much praise. We know enough about the movie to be intrigued, but not enough to feel spoilt. However, the scribe has spoken out about the newer additions to the young cast - particularly Cyclops, Jean Grey, and Storm - describing Summers as "*not yet the squeaky-clean leader*", Storm as a "*troubled character who is going down the wrong path in life*", and Grey as "*complex, interesting and not fully mature.*"

A big secret kept under close guard is that of Wolverine's involvement. Hugh Jackman's Logan has appeared in every single X-Men movie thus far, and the character still has an arsenal of questions which require answers following the decade-spanning events of *Days of Future Past*. The actor sat proudly at the San Diego Comic Con panel last year, but words are yet to slip as to any appearance.

Whilst *X-Men: Apocalypse* arrives in a highly transitional year for comic book entertainment, it is the film still yet to play its ace. We've unlocked the vaults of its rivals already, but here's a multi-million-dollar epic that's clouded in ambiguity. A difficult task ahead it may be for Singer and 20th Century Fox, but one which entirely demands your attention.



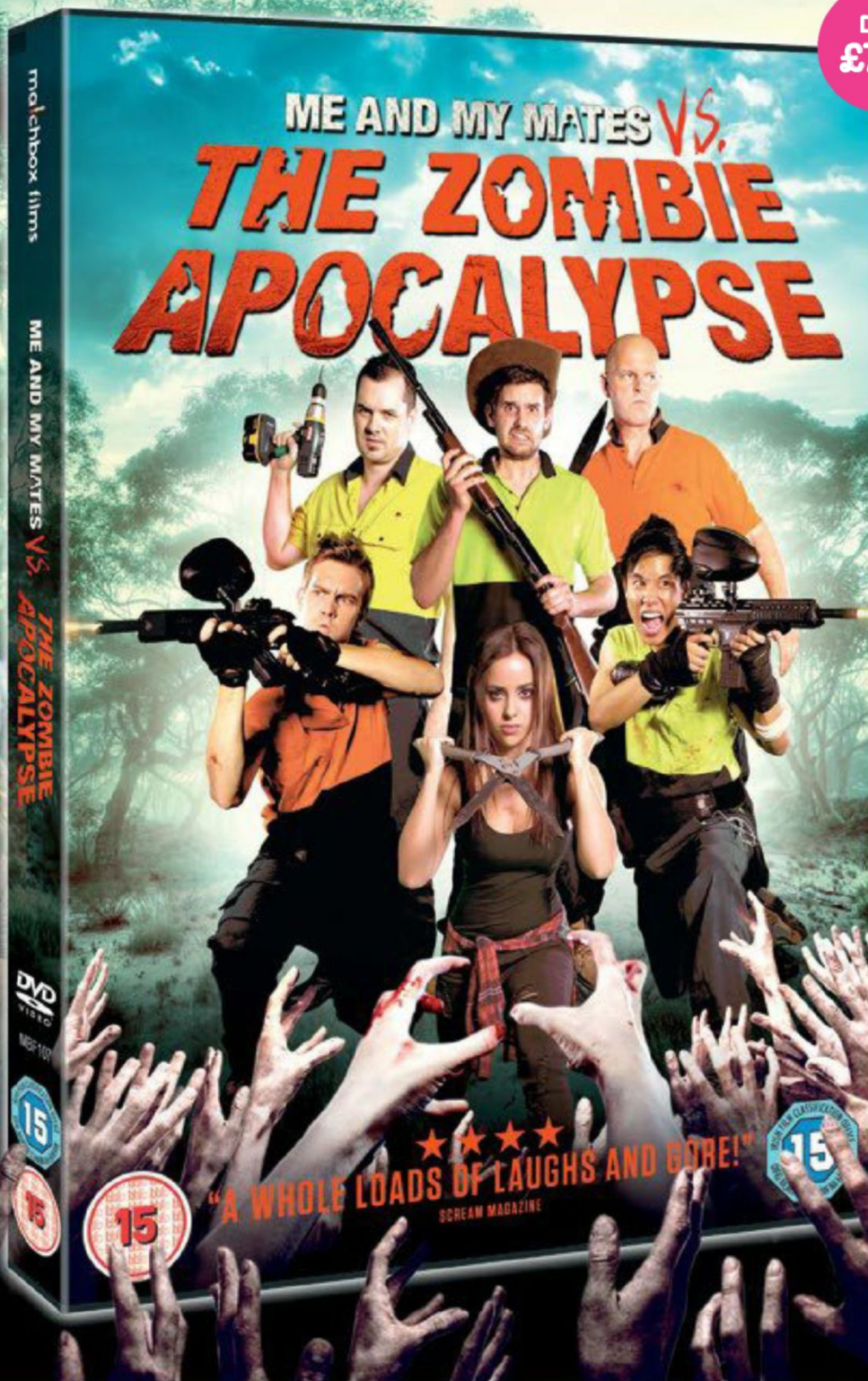
*X-MEN: APOCALYPSE* arrives in UK cinemas on May 19th and May 27th in the US.



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# DAZE OF FUTURE, PAST AND PRESENT

by Robin Pierce

**As we set our sights on the upcoming adventure for THE STRANGEST SUPER-HEROES OF ALL, we recap the convoluted timeline of the mutant series...**



**M**utation: it is the key to our evolution. It has enabled us to evolve from a single-celled organism into the dominant species on the planet. This process is slow, and normally taking thousands and thousands of years. But every few hundred millennia, evolution leaps forward." So says Professor Charles Xavier in the first X-Men film.

In the near future, Xavier runs the School for Gifted Youngsters in Westchester, New York. The gifted children are all mutants, each with unique powers. The school has an underground complex, including a sleek, advanced aircraft, and several of the staff of the school are in training for a war that is being foretold by Erik Lehnsherr, a mutant with whom Xavier has some history.

Xavier's power is a telepathy, and he has developed a device called Cerebro to enhance his reach and find other mutants. Lehnsherr has the power of controlling magnetism. In his guise of Magneto, he plans to use an invention of his to turn everybody into mutants. What he doesn't realise is that the machine will actually cause genocide on a global scale due to a defect.

Meanwhile, a young girl named Marie has discovered that she can't actually touch anybody without literally absorbing their life force. She meets up with a bare-knuckle cage fighter named Logan (Hugh Jackman), who competes under the name of Wolverine, apparently an old military code name.



## The X-Men Movie Saga So Far...



When attacked by two of Magneto's sidekicks, Sabretooth and Toad, Wolverine and Marie, who has adopted the name Rogue, are rescued by Cyclops (who has force beams emitting from his eyes) and Storm (who can control the weather).

Wolverine has regenerative powers, and an Adamantium-lined skeleton, and he also has retractable claws coming from the knuckles of his hands. But he has no idea about his past. At the Xavier School, he does, however, develop an instant love for Dr Jean Grey, a telekinetic mutant and girlfriend of Scott Summers - Cyclops.

Reluctantly, Wolverine abandons his loner lifestyle to join the superhero team, as they swing into action to prevent Magneto from using his machine. In return, Xavier gives Wolverine a lead on tracing his past. 'Borrowing' Cyclops's motorcycle, he rides off into the night, in search of who he really is.

X2 expanded on the continuity. Wolverine is still seeking answers to his origins at the deserted military installation at Alkali Lake, but returns to Xavier's school empty handed. Magneto is still imprisoned for his crimes. The mutant war is still a very real threat, exacerbated by an attack on the President in the Oval Office by a teleporting mutant calling himself Nightcrawler.

Xavier uses Cerebro to locate Nightcrawler and sends Jean Grey and Storm to collect the mysterious mutant and recruit him to the team.

However, a covert operations specialist named William Stryker had brainwashed Nightcrawler into undertaking his actions at the White House and is also using drugs to extract information from Magneto to build a second Cerebro machine inside the dam at Alkali Lake, which Wolverine had somehow completely overlooked.

Magneto, in happier times, had helped Xavier build the original Cerebro and plans to use the second, upgraded version to locate and wipe out the mutants. Stryker is also collecting intelligence on Xavier's school and launches a military raid against it, capturing some of the students.

The X-Men are in disarray. Magneto escapes from the authorities with the aid of Mystique. Cyclops and Xavier are in the clutches of Stryker, who is using his own telepathically mutated son to manipulate the Professor into using the new Cerebro. Meanwhile, Cyclops has been brainwashed into attacking his comrades.

Could things get any worse?

Well, yes – Stryker has a female sidekick in Lady Deathstrike, who also

has an Adamantium skeleton. Not that she's any match for Wolverine, but as Wolverine finds himself in a familiar lab, he discovers that Stryker was the one responsible for his Adamantium claws.

Magneto and his newly recruited ally, the teenaged fire-powered Pyro, escape with Mystique but the X-Men are trapped with a malfunctioning jet as the dam bursts. Jean Grey uses every ounce of her power to keep the flood at bay until the X-Jet is rebooted and soars to safety, leaving Jean to be crushed by the water, along with Stryker.

As shocking as this downbeat ending was, it led perfectly into *X-Men: The Last Stand*.

Wolverine and Cyclops are still mourning the loss of Jean. Some of the mutants, including Rogue, are overjoyed that Worthington Labs have developed an inoculation that can cure the mutant gene by suppressing it. Not everybody's happy, though. The increasingly militant mutants who don't want a cure are finding themselves a leader in Magneto, who sees the 'cure' as a means of exterminating the mutants. In fact, when Mystique is accidentally shot with the cure during a bid to save Magneto, he heartlessly abandons her as she no longer has her shapeshifting abilities.

Worse still is Cyclops's fate, suffering an off-screen death on the shores of





Lake Alkali at the hands of Jean, who is now resurrected as the evil Phoenix. But the absolute worst is yet to come – Phoenix also seemingly kills Professor Xavier himself in a telekinetic attack, using her powers to disintegrate him before joining Magneto and his Brotherhood of Mutants.

The last stand of the title pits the expanded ranks of the X-Men, now including, among others, The Beast – a blue-furred, agile, and dextrous mutant, and Kitty Pryde, who can literally run through walls against the massed ranks of the militants led by Magneto and Phoenix. Magneto is injected with the cure, Phoenix loses control momentarily and reverts to Jean, who is then killed by Wolverine's claws. In a final twist, Rogue voluntarily takes the cure.

Mourning their losses, the X-Men reopen the school. With Xavier, Magneto, Cyclops, Mystique, Rogue, and Jean all now out of the picture, the story arc was finished. So where to go next?

Seemingly, prequels were the order of the day. *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* was intended to cast some light on Logan. As a standalone film, it worked very well. But as a part of the ongoing saga, it just didn't fit.

This film takes place, as the title suggests, before the events of *X-Men*.

We discover that Wolverine/Logan's real name is James Howlett, and he is much, much older than we had thought. He's a young boy in the film's opening sequence, set in 1845. The trauma of seeing his father killed triggers bone claws to extend from the knuckles of both hands, and he has amazing recuperative powers. He is actually the biological brother of Victor Creed – Sabretooth from the first film.

Both of them have fought in every war they could join, including the Civil War, both World Wars, and Vietnam. Yet, neither Logan nor Creed recognise each other in the first *X-Men* film, which would have occurred sometime after this one, which appears to be set in the seventies. Logan's amnesia about a dead wife and his Adamantium enhancement at the hands of Stryker are explained when Stryker shoots him twice in the head with an Adamantium bullet, but one would have thought that Creed would surely remember his own brother when they met again. Similarly, Wolverine rescues a high school-aged Scott Summers from Stryker's facility, and he completely fails to recognise Logan later on as well.

Even Stryker's fate of being compelled to walk until his feet bleed, then walk some more, and his subsequent arrest by the Military Police is at odds with what we saw in *X2*.

But despite these flaws, it's not a bad

film. It's an interesting character study of Logan, and it introduced us to Deadpool; but again, not quite the recent cinematic Deadpool we now know and love.

*X-Men: First Class* took the whole saga back to its beginnings. But again it threw a Hulk-sized spanner into the wheels of continuity.

Young Charles Xavier meets young Raven Darkholme at the ages of 12 and 10, respectively. Raven is, of course, the shapeshifting Mystique. This would make her around her mid-sixties during the original *X-Men* trilogy, assuming she was in her twenties in 1962, during the Cuban missile crisis, when the bulk of the film is set.

The film explores the formation of the original X-Men team, the meeting and subsequent working partnership between Xavier and Lehnsherr, in their pre-Professor X and Magneto days, and their struggle against Sebastian Shaw, the sadistic concentration camp scientist who conducted tests on Lehnsherr during his incarceration.

The original line-up consisted of a female 'Angel' with insect-like wings – more like Ant-Man's Wasp – the Beast, Banshee, and Havoc. They did actually try to recruit Wolverine for a cameo, but the reply was pretty emphatic.

On Shaw's side is a teleporter called





Azazel and a telepath who can change her body to a hardened diamond surface named Emma Frost – and there comes one of those continuity bloopers again. Frost was one of the mutants whom Wolverine had rescued from Stryker's facility, along with Scott Summers, in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, which was set in the seventies. At that point, she was a child. But in THIS film, she is clearly in her early twenties, despite the film being set over a decade earlier.

We also see the building of the original Cerebro by Xavier and Lehnsherr, and learn that it's Shaw's Nazi rhetoric about the mutants that influenced Lehnsherr later on in his life. Shaw had also designed and used the telepathy-blocking helmet that Magneto later adopts as part of his costume and we learn that it's Lehnsherr who accidentally causes the injury that eventually places Xavier in a wheelchair. Not surprisingly, Xavier and Lehnsherr go their separate ways, each with a group of mutant followers, at the end of the film. As both the Russians and the Americans fired missiles at the mutants during the Cuban missile crisis, but Lehnsherr had deflected them harmlessly to the sea, Homo sapiens' mistrust of mutants is now firmly established. As is Lehnsherr's agenda.

*The Wolverine* again changed the continuity, opening with a flashback of

Logan as a prisoner of war in Hiroshima on the day the atom bomb was dropped. No sign of his brother, with whom we understood he had fought the World Wars. Its modern day setting meant this served as a bridge from *The Last Stand*. Logan is now a hermit, living rough in the mountains and haunted by dreams of his past and his lost love, Jean Grey.

Summoned to Japan to the deathbed of a soldier, now a wealthy industrialist, whose life he had saved in Hiroshima, Logan is robbed of his recuperative powers. Wolverine has to fight the Yakuza, and actually loses his Adamantium claws in the process of fighting a robot Samurai, which causes his body to revert back to his pre-enhanced bone claws. The sting at the end of the film re-introduces Xavier and Magneto – fully recovered from disintegration, fully powered and warning of a new threat, which means Wolverine is needed.

That threat was an adaptation of one of the most revered X-Men stories, *Days of Future Past*. The timeline was about to get even more convoluted.

In the future, mutants are being hunted down and killed by an army of Sentinel robots developed by Bolivar Trask, a brilliant scientist. Mystique had assassinated Trask in 1973, but had been captured and her DNA used to

enhance the Sentinels who can now adapt to any mutant power. Inexplicably, the older Professor X is no longer disintegrated, and the older Magneto has his powers back. Even Rogue is back, mysteriously re-powered. The mission is that Kitty Pryde (no longer just able to morph through walls, but instead with the ability to send a person's consciousness back through time) propels Wolverine back to the seventies to solicit help from the younger Xavier and Magneto to prevent all this from happening.

Although Trask's assassination is prevented during the Presidential launch of the Sentinel program, Xavier allows Mystique to escape with Magneto. Again, she appears here pretty much the same age as she was in the first X-Men film. The public sees the events as a mutant having saved the President and the Sentinel programme is cancelled – just as they were slaughtering the final remaining X-Men in the future. Logan awakes from his journey to see ALL of the X-Men alive and well, including Cyclops and Jean Grey, the altered past now having changed the present. However, past Wolverine has just been discovered by Stryker and has an imminent Adamantium graft to look forward to.

As for the future, ominously called *Apocalypse*... Who knows?





# THE EVOLUTION OF the X-MEN

## PART ONE

by Andrew Pollard

In terms of creative hotbeds, they don't come much bigger than the early 1960s comic book landscape, particularly where MARVEL COMICS was concerned. Following the creation of such juggernauts as the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Hulk, Thor, and Iron Man, 1963 saw Stan Lee and Jack Kirby put together a team of heroes known as the X-MEN. The rest, as they say, is history...

### X-Men Origins

The X-Men have one of the most convoluted and confusing histories in all of comics, but here we're going to try and at least make some semblance of sense of the antics of Charles Xavier's gifted mutants. Well, we can't promise that all will be clear when we get to the mess that was the late '80s and early '90s, but we'll deal with those days when we get to them. For now, though, let's go right back to the beginning.

The X-Men #1 debuted way back in September 1963, with the reasoning for their creation being that Stan Lee wanted another

team of heroes. Deciding that

not every person could be bitten by a radioactive spider or transformed via gamma rays, Lee came up with the idea that his latest creations were superpowered because they were born that way. And thus, the notion of the comic book mutant was born. In fact, Lee initially wanted to call the team and their book **The Mutants**, but this was shot down by Marvel publisher Martin Goodman. The X-Men moniker itself was given to the team, as explained in the very first issue by Professor X himself, because the heroes "possess an extra power... one which ordinary humans do not! That is why I call my students... X-Men, for EX-tra power!" The creation of the team also pulled inspiration from Wilmar H. Shiras' classic piece of sci-fi, *Children of the Atom*.

That first team of mutants, as overseen by paraplegic telepath Charles Xavier, was made up of telekinetic-cum-telepath Jean Grey/Marvel Girl, the winged Warren Worthington III/Angel, the genius and athletic Hank McCoy/Beast, the ice-manipulating Bobby Drake/Iceman, and leader Scott Summers/Cyclops, who had the ability to fire energy blasts from his eyes. Like many of Marvel's finest, the X-Men called New York home, with Xavier's group having the X-Mansion, later to be called the School for Gifted Youngsters, in Salem Center, Westchester County as their base of operations. But what is a great set of heroes





without a great villain to bounce off?

Also appearing for the first time in **X-Men #1** was a man who would go on to become the Joker to the X-Men's Batman, the Lex Luthor to their Superman, and the Dr. Doom to their Fantastic Four. Enter: Magneto. This was a slightly different Magneto to who we would become accustomed to all those years later, with him being merely a straight-up villain here. He still had the majority of his familiar powers, he was still the Master of Magnetism, after all, but the friendship with Professor X and the troubled days of being an antihero of sorts were way off in the distance. And much like Xavier had his team, it wouldn't be long before Magneto introduced a team of his own, with **The X-Men #4** seeing the likes of Quicksilver, Scarlet Witch, Toad, and Mastermind part of Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil Mutants.

With heroes and villains in place, the X-Men tales of the '60s told the age-old story of good vs. evil. Although from its infancy, there was plenty of deeper meaning with themes of prejudice and racism there for all to see. Unfortunately, though, Marvel's **The X-Men** title didn't do as well as was first hoped. Whilst new villains would be introduced – most notably Juggernaut, Blob, and the mutant-hating Sentinels – a lot of the X-stories would be one-shot tales that featured vanilla villain-of-the-week sorts. Additionally, only one new X-Men member was brought into Xavier's ranks during the team's initial run, with Mimic (who would years later be adapted into Morph for the '90s' **X-Men: The Animated Series**) joining Professor X's crusade.

As sales dropped, Lee and Kirby left **The X-Men** in 1966, with Roy Thomas and Werner Roth taking over duties for a short time. Following further drops in sales figures, the book would actually exist without a standard creative team from 1968 to 1969. In a move done to save the book, the

legendary Neal Adams was brought in to work on the title with a returning Thomas. This move would result in new characters like Polaris, then known as Lorna Dane and possessing the powers of a Magneto-lite, and Havok, the energy-manipulating brother of Cyclops. Sales figures did improve slightly, largely put down to Adams' work, but the title was kind of cancelled in early 1970. By kind of, we mean that new stories were stopped, although the title would continue to exist due to Marvel simply reprinting old X-Men stories. In the meantime, Xavier's mutants would pop up in the likes of **The Incredible Hulk**, **The Avengers**, and **Marvel Team-Up**, but the greater picture was a messy one for the X-Men.

### All-New, All-Different

After spending some time in the wilderness or simply tagging on to other heroes' stories, the X-Men were given a fresh lease of life in 1975 when Len Wein and David Cockrum delivered **Giant-Size X-Men #1**. This special served as a reintroduction of sorts for the X-Men but, more importantly, it was essentially a brand new start for our favourite mutants. This re-launch looked to introduce a new bunch of X-Men, with Professor X bringing together a fresh team of mutants to go on a rescue mission to save the familiar old faces. Led by Cyclops, this new team headed to the living island of Krakoa to rescue the likes of Jean Grey, Beast, Angel, and Iceman. One of the big mission objectives of this new approach was to make the X-Men a more multi-cultural group, meaning that their fan base could be furthered across the globe; this 'all-new, all-different' team featured Japanese hot-head, Shiro Yoshida/Sunfire; sonic-powered Irishman Sean Cassidy/Banshee; hulking, indestructible, steel-based Soviet Piotr Rasputin/Colossus; enhanced Apache John Proudstar/Thunderbird; teleporting blue German Kurt Wagner/Nightcrawler;



weather-controlling Kenyan Ororo Munroe/Storm; and a badass, no-nonsense, Adamantium-filled Canadian furball known as Logan/Wolverine. Quite the multi-cultural, multi-racial group, no? And certainly this new X-Men team lived up to the all-new, all-different moniker that was regularly lauded over the return of Xavier's team.

Following the success and positive reaction to **Giant-Size X-Men #1** came a whole slew of new X-Men stories, with Marvel once more deciding to publish new X-tales as opposed to just reprinting yarns of yesteryear. With the soon-to-be-legendary Chris Claremont brought on board to work with Cockrum on the relaunch of the **X-Men**, Xavier's team continued forward with their new line-up, bar Sunfire and Thunderbird. Sunfire had spat his dummy and quit the X-Men, whilst poor Thunderbird lasted only two issues before being killed in **X-Men #95**. But while the future wasn't exactly bright for the doomed Thunderbird, things were looking up for the X-Men as a







whole, for Chris Claremont would go on to be revered as the person who delivered many of their very finest outings during a whopping 17-year-run with Marvel's mutants. And it was one of Claremont's most famous arcs that was just around the corner for the X-Men.

### Phoenix Rises

With **The Dark Phoenix Saga**, long-time comic book fans were given one of the greatest, not to mention most shocking, comic book arcs to have been published by that point in time. You have to remember, this was at a point when solid arcs of any real length were at a minimum, with plenty

of titles instead doing 'one-and-done' type stories that led to issues being easy to just pick up and read for casual comic book fans. By doing something like this, which was actually split into **The Phoenix Saga** and **The Dark Phoenix Saga**, it showed a change in the game, making it known that comic fans of the day were prepared to invest time and effort into a winding story that spanned over many more than just one or two issues.

**The Phoenix Saga** would begin in 1976's **The X-Men #101** and conclude in **The X-Men #108**. In this tale, Jean Grey would end up bonded to a cosmic entity known as the Phoenix as an intergalactic adventure saw the introduction of the Shi'ar race, the repairing of the M'Kraan Crystal, and the expanded look at Lilandra, the empress of the Shi'ar and somebody who would become an on-off love interest of Charles Xavier's over the years. **The Phoenix Saga** actually went pretty well for Jean, with her initially tapping into the very maximum limits of her powers and assuming what was essentially her ultimate form. This was a Jean Grey who was as powerful as she'd ever be and who was often deemed as even more powerful than Professor X at times.

This was a further time of change for the X-Men world as a whole, with John Byrne brought in to work alongside Chris Claremont in 1978 in a move that would give further creative invention to the title. In fact, the title of the book itself would even change at this time, with the book informally changed from **The X-Men** to **Uncanny X-Men** with #114 before the name change became official with #142. Within the pages of the title came new additions such as the all-Canadian team of Alpha Flight, Proteus, Mystique, and Moira MacTaggart and the concept of Muir Island, a genetic research facility.

Before we knew it, though, with the X-Men tales proving more and more popular with each passing issue, came the second

part of the whole **Phoenix** arc, with **The Dark Phoenix Saga** starting in 1980's **The X-Men #129** and running until **The X-Men #138**. Here, with Jean still at one with the Phoenix Force, the nefarious Hellfire Club came into the equation, with Mastermind using every trick up his sleeve to manipulate Jean/Phoenix to do his bidding. Sadly, all Mastermind's illusions and falsities succeeded in doing was unleashing the dark, unhinged side of the Phoenix power. In fact, so erratic and messed up was Jean, who was commonly going by the Phoenix moniker by now, that she actually destroyed a planet that housed over 5 billion people! With the carnage caused amongst the stars, Lilandra would step in and take Phoenix captive. All this would succeed in doing, however, was lead to a battle between the Shi'ar and the X-Men. Taking to the Moon, the two groups would come together, with the fate of Jean Grey resting on the outcome. With the X-Men losing the fight, and with Cyclops injured, all that this battle succeeded in doing was causing Jean to go further off the deep end as the darker elements of the Phoenix again came to the forefront of her mind. Realising that excessive action was the only way to deal with this threat, Lilandra consulted with the Kree and the Skrulls, deciding that the threat of Phoenix was even more dangerous than the planet-devouring Galactus. As such, Xavier's alien booty call made the move to actually order the destruction of the entire solar system (overkill, much?) in order to make sure that the Phoenix was wiped out. And this is where things took a turn for the truly sad, with Professor X instructing his X-Men to kill Jean in order to stop the whole solar system from being destroyed. It wouldn't come to that, though, as Jean would manage to get enough hold over the Phoenix Force so that she could make the ultimate sacrifice, using a Kree disintegrator to essentially commit suicide in one of the



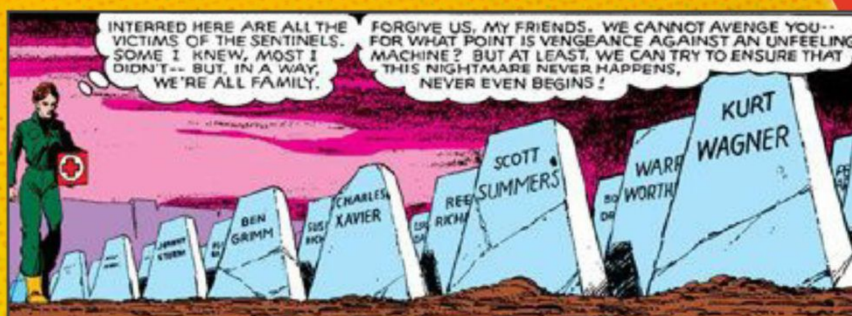


most shocking moments in comic book history up to that point. Until then, death in comics was something that was reserved for side characters, and even then it was a rarity. To kill off such a major, *major* player was a huge moment in the history of Marvel Comics and in the history of the industry as a whole. But it happened, and it was down to the X-Men to pick up the pieces in the aftermath of the death of one of their original and most beloved members.

### Days of Future Past and Beyond

Whilst the whole Phoenix Force issues also saw the likes of Kitty Pryde and Dazzler introduced to the X-Men realm, a whole new world was on the horizon with the iconic **Days of Future Past** arc. Along with **The Dark Phoenix Saga**, **Days of Future Past** is the most famous of all the X-tales, and was, of course, even adapted for the big screen by Bryan Singer in 2014. Now, even though this arc is held in the highest of high esteem amongst comic books fans, the initial tale actually only ran for two issues, adorning the pages of **The Uncanny X-Men** #141 and #142 in 1981. For the first time, it gave a glimpse at a real alternative future (something that would become far too frequent and tedious in comics as a whole over the forthcoming years), we saw the relatively new Kitty Pryde become the pivotal part of this particular puzzling plot. The story was simple: the adult 'Kate' Pryde lived in a post-apocalyptic, dystopian 2013 in which mutants were hunted down and killed by Sentinels. It was a bleak, bleak time, and Kate would use her abilities to transfer her mind way back in time to her younger self, the then-current day Kitty Pryde.

Kate/Kitty's plan is to stop the act that caused mutants to be hated, which is revealed to be the assassination of Senator Robert Kelly. The shapeshifting Mystique and her newly reformed Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, which saw newbies Pyro,



Avalanche and Destiny joined by the Blob, were responsible for Senator Kelly's death, and so Kitty joins with 1981's X-Men team to stop Kelly's assassination from ever happening in the hope that this will lead to a future without such hate for mutants and in which the world hasn't gone down the toilet. Of course, heroes being heroes means that, yes, the job's a good 'un and the X-Men succeed. This sends the mind of Kate Pryde back to 2013, while the X-Men of 1981 are left to ponder whether this foiled assassination attempt will actually change anything as far as their futures are concerned. What this legendary story did do, though, was that it firmly hit home a theme of mutants being hated purely because they were different, and this is a theme that would take centre stage for a large part of the 1980s and beyond.

Continuing the prospect of hating those pesky mutants, 1982 delivered a little graphic novel by the name of **X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills**. Penned by Chris Claremont and with art from Brent Anderson (not to be confused with Brett Anderson of Suede fame), this saw William Stryker start a crusade against the X-Men and mutants in general. Stryker led what could best be called a cult, with the views of he and his people that of extremists. In fact, Stryker and his men pulled no punches during this

hard-hitting arc; the story itself starts off with Magneto investigating the death of two mutant children at the hands of Stryker's men, whilst Stryker himself went one further and killed his own wife and son after his newborn son was a deformed mutant. As such, Stryker was certainly a man of conviction in his mission to eradicate all mutantkind, even if his mission was one filled with prejudice and discrimination as he claimed that all mutants were abominations of God. But things would get even worse for the X-Men when Stryker kidnapped Professor X and attached him to a machine that was to use Xavier's psychic abilities to wipe out every single one of the world's mutants in an act of mass genocide. With this huge threat to the very existence of mutants, longtime foe Magneto ended up having to join the X-Men in their efforts to topple Stryker and rescue Professor X. And if you think this all sounds just a tad familiar, yes, this was indeed the basis of the plot for Bryan Singer's **X2**, although certain parts of the tale were altered for the big screen retelling of the X-Men's battle against Stryker and his plans to wipe out their kind. In the comic book realm, the story would end with Magneto and the X-Men managing to get Stryker to publicly admit his heinous plans, whilst Xavier would be successfully rescued. Stryker would get his, too, for he'd





end up shot by a security guard after he'd tried to murder Kitty Pryde. In the fallout of this, Xavier actually offered the X-Men's nemesis, Magneto, a position on his team, but the Master of Magnetism turned Charles down. This would be one of the first times in which readers saw Magneto in a light that didn't just scream 'no-good villain', and it was merely a taste of what was to come as the rogue would become a hugely complicated and multi-layered character over the next decade or more.

### X-Pansion

Whilst the character of Magneto would soon start to expand and get some much-needed depth, the early 1980s saw the X-Men world as a whole undergo some major changes and expansion. And we're not just talking about characters. Sure, newbies such as alien villainess Deathbird, alien insectoids the Brood, and the badass mutant-hunting Nimrod were brought into the fold, not to mention new heroes such as bawdy southern belle Rogue, weapons expert Forge, and even Rachel Summers, the adult daughter of Cyclops and Jean Grey, but the changes amongst the X-Men world were far further reaching than the action within the pages of **Uncanny X-Men**. With Chris Claremont joined by the likes of Paul Smith and then the legendary John Romita Jr., so popular were the X-Men that one title was simply not enough for Xavier's gifted mutants. And so came some new mutant books for readers to snaffle up. In fairness, an expansion of the X-Men world was long overdue by this point, as **Uncanny X-Men** had become the #1 selling Marvel Comics title of the day and comic book retailers actually started using what was known as an 'X-Men index' in order to rate each other book's orders in comparison to each month's **Uncanny X-Men** sales. Quite the impressive feat considering that Xavier's mutants were kept in the shadows for the

late '60s and early '70s.

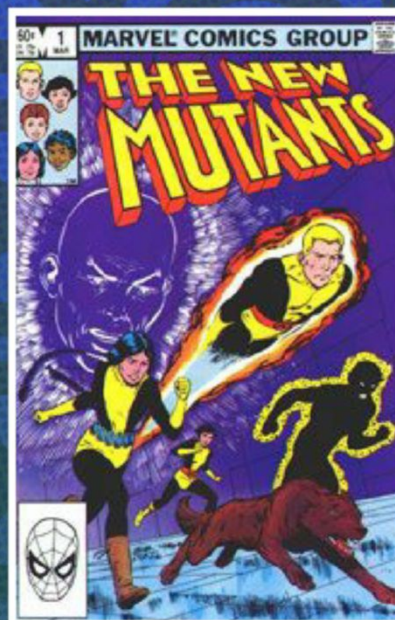
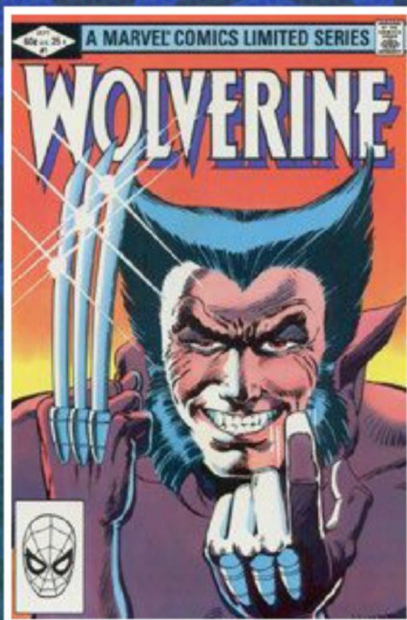
By this point in time, Wolverine was starting to become the most popular part of **Uncanny X-Men** and so the waters were well and truly tested with late 1982's well-received **Wolverine** limited series. Joining Claremont on this brief run was the iconic Frank Miller, and the tale explored Logan's time in Japan and his relationship with Mariko. It was a milestone for the Wolverine character, and the response to it only increased the demand for the Canucklehead. A full-on solo series was in the future for Wolvie, although that wouldn't come around until later in the '80s; his role amongst the X-Men books was starting to become a major, major one.

In further new title news, the team known as the New Mutants made their debut in December 1982's **Marvel Graphic Novel #4**. This new team, created by Claremont and Bob McLeod under the order of Marvel's editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, pulled its title from Stan Lee's original name for the X-Men. They'd soon start their own series, simply named **The New Mutants**, which ran from 1983 until 1991 before getting a rebrand. The idea behind this new title was to give a younger feel to the X-Men world. After all, the team first introduced way back in 1963 were now all adults. So, brought into the fold to fill out the New Mutants line-up were body-controlling Vietnamese Xi'an Coy Manh/Karma, jet-propelled Kentucky native Samuel Guthrie/Cannonball, Chyenne magical illusionist Danielle Moonstar/Mirage, solar-fueled Brazilian Roberto da Costa/Sunspot, and the wolf-like Scotsman known as Rahne Sinclair/Wolfbane. It wouldn't be long before Sal Buscema, and then Bill Sienkiewicz, were brought in on art duties, and Claremont would do his best to take the stories in a darker direction to what many comic book readers were used to. The action itself would take in more outlandish adventures, with the future, evil dimensions,



and even ancient civilisations all having parts to play in the infancy of **The New Mutants**. As for villains, this team of youngsters would often tangle with the Hellfire Club and their offshoot teen team, the Hellions.

Elsewhere, having been first seen in **The X-Men #120** in 1979, the Canadian superhero team known as Alpha Flight – basically a Canuck version of the Avengers – were given their own series in August 1983, with the initial team of Weapon Alpha-turned-Vindicator-turned-Guardian. Northstar, Aurora, Sasquatch, Shaman, and Snowbird soon joined by Beta Flight members Marrina and Puck. The first twenty-eight issues of this **Alpha Flight** series were penned and illustrated by John Byrne, with the title then moving over to various creative teams over the years, most notably having **The Incredible Hulk's** Bill Mantlo on writing duties for a lengthy period and even seeing future Hellboy creator Mike Mignola provide artwork for the series. The first **Alpha Flight** title would actually run for a remarkable eleven years, although even then a lot of the time their stories would feel like X-Men-lite tales. Still, as a lifelong Bret 'Hitman' Hart fan, who





doesn't love Canadians, right?

Whilst new titles were the order of the day, and further new titles still to come, changes were also happening over in the main *Uncanny* book. *Uncanny X-Men* #168 would introduce a woman by the name of Madelyne Pryor, while the following issue would debut a group of sewer-dwelling mutants known as the Morlocks. These new additions would have some serious repercussions for two long-time X-Men members: Cyclops and Storm. Where Cyke was concerned, he got hit in the heartstrings upon meeting Madelyne, for she looked exactly the same as his deceased 'one true', Jean Grey. So much so, Scott would actually believe that she was a resurrected Jean. Sadly for the elder Summers brother, this wouldn't be the case, and Jean would still be totally, totally dead (for now...), although he and Storm would have to snap into action when a still-miffed-from-that-Phoenix-stuff Mastermind resurfaced and kidnapped Maddy. Our heroes would get Madelyne to safety, although that was largely down to the powers of Storm, who by this point was becoming as important to the X-Men as their leader Cyclops was. Finally coming to terms with Madelyne being Madelyne and not simply a reborn Jean Grey, Scott decides that the two should be an item regardless (which is a tad creepy considering she looks identical to his dead ex-Mrs). As such, and because comic books waste no time with this stuff, they would soon be married and Cyclops would retire from the X-Men. Clearly bros before hoes was a mantra that Cyke had never heard of.

For Storm, the early 1980s was certainly a time of growth, as she started to stand up more and more as a leader of men. After she'd had a tough time of it following an intergalactic battle with the Brood, her next task of note was to rescue Angel from the aforementioned Morlocks. With Kitty Pryde's life hanging in the

balance, a plague-infected Storm actually challenges Callisto, the Morlock leader, to a fight for leadership of the Morlocks. Storm would manage to nab the win in this battle, and the X-Men's resident weather wizard would become the de facto head of the underground mutants. After the Morlocks passed up the opportunity to move from their Manhattan sewers to Xavier's mansion, Storm's attentions turned to a team a lot closer to home.

As *Uncanny X-Men* headed towards its two-hundredth issue, the times they were a-changing for the X-Men once more. With Cyclops on the fence about retiring from the X-Men or returning back to action, it came down to Cyke battling a powerless, Mohawk-sporting Storm in a Danger Room fight for control of the X-Men team. Surprisingly to some, Storm would win this one, with Scott then finally admitting to himself that he needed to retire and focus on his wife, who would soon give birth to their son (you may have heard of him – glowing-eyed, metal-armed, telekinetic time-traveller?). More surprising than Cyclops retiring to married life after a beating from Storm, though, was a twist at the top of the food chain.

Now while we have heard plenty about his pupils, this period in time was also a tough one for Charles Xavier. Chuck would discover that he actually had a son called David with Gabrielle Haller, but that his offspring suffered from extreme multiple personality disorder, which was only heightened by having inherited his pops' psionic abilities. But it was Charles' relationship with Magneto that really stood out at this time. With the Master of Magnetism placed on trial for various crimes against humanity, Xavier would actually defend his longtime foe and insist that he was a reformed character. Of course, the court trial itself would be hijacked – Baron von Strucker's kids,



Andrea and Andreas, would attack the courtroom – and in the ensuing chaos, Xavier would suffer life-threatening injuries. Lilandra, who by this point in time had a psychic bond with Professor X, would sense his troubles and head to Earth to rescue him. Taken into the stars in order to be treated by Shi'ar technology, Xavier had one last wish: he placed Magneto in charge of his legendary School for Gifted Youngsters.

That brings our first part of this comic book lookback to an end, with plenty of new X-books, plenty of huge stories, and, yes, sadly lots of convoluted timelines and straight-up ridiculous plot points still left to navigate. Safe to say, the X-Men's comic book history is certainly a colourful one, and it's set to get even more intense when we return to wrap things up next month.





# ANIMATION X-CAPADES

BY ANDREW POLLARD

**THERE'S NO DISPUTING THAT THE X-MEN ARE ONE OF MARVEL'S MOST PRIZED ASSETS, AND LIKE EVERY GOOD BUNCH OF HEROES, THEY'VE BEEN GIVEN THE CARTOON TREATMENT PLENTY OF TIMES OVER THE DECADES. SO, SIT BACK AND REMINISCE WITH US AS WE EXPLORE THE ANIMATED HISTORY OF CHARLES XAVIER'S MENAGERIE OF MUTANTS.**

## SOMEONE ELSE'S SHADOW

While the X-Men have had several well-received cartoon series over the years, their humble animated beginnings saw them regularly served up as side dishes to someone else's main course. Their first such appearance came in an early 1966 episode of **The Marvel Super Heroes**, a mere three years after their comic book debut. The show itself was essentially a showcase-style affair that rotated its main attention between various Marvel heroes, mainly Captain America, Thor, Iron Man, Hulk and Sub-Mariner. In fact, it was actually a Namor-centric episode in which the X-Men made their bow, helping him to tackle Dr. Doom in an episode titled **Dr. Doom's Day**. The odd thing here, though, was that the team was referred to as the Allies for Peace. Make no mistake about it, mind, this was *definitely* the X-Men - with Cyclops, Jean Grey, Iceman, Angel, and Beast all present and accounted for. The story itself was based on a Fantastic Four tale, but the animation company didn't have the rights to Marvel's First Family, and so the X-Men were shoehorned in to assist Namor.

Following this brief appearance, our favourite mutants wouldn't have another outing until 1981, turning up at various points to join Spidey in the much-revered **Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends**. For those old enough to remember that particular show, one of the key players in the series was the X-Men's Iceman. Along with Firestar (created newly for the show and who was deemed to have previously been a member of the X-Men), Bobby Drake would accompany ol' Webhead as he tackled a plethora of bad guys. Although Bobby's Iceman was a permanent fixture of the series, the show would also see the likes of Professor X, Cyclops, Angel, Storm, Wolverine, Sunfire, Colossus, Nightcrawler, Kitty Pryde, and even Magneto and Juggernaut all



The Marvel Super Heroes



Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends



Pryde of the X-Men





X-Men: The Animated Series



stopping by to join in the action.

Of course, helping out other heroes was all well and good, but it wasn't actually until 1989 that a real solid effort was made to give Xavier's gifted children their own cartoon series. That effort was something known as **Pryde of the X-Men**. This was a 30-minute pilot for what was planned as a full X-Men series. Sadly, it wasn't picked up, although the pilot did make it to air and even to a VHS release. The story told the tale of Kitty Pryde becoming a member of the X-Men, with Professor X's team itself made up of Cyclops, Wolverine, Storm, Nightcrawler, Dazzler, and Colossus. Our heroes went up against Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil Muta... oh, wait, no, our heroes went up against Magneto's randomly renamed Brotherhood of Mutant Terrorists, which saw the Master of Magnetism joined by Juggernaut, Pyro, Toad, Blob, and Emma Frost. This pilot would impress many –

well, bar Wolverine having an Australian accent! Luckily, another chance wasn't all that far away.

### X-MEN: THE ANIMATED SERIES

Ah, there we are – the one we all fondly remember. For many, **X-Men: The Animated Series** is one of the finest cartoons they've ever seen. This series was the definitive X-Men effort, and revolutionary in how it actually had a continuous narrative with season-long arcs. Sure, Warner Brothers' stunning **Batman: The Animated Series** was wowing viewers elsewhere, but that show was largely 'one and done' type stories. **X-Men: The Animated Series** and later **Spider-Man: The Animated Series**, both of which were produced by FOX Kids, was a game changer in how it would slowly unravel its story over multiple episodes, with certain plot points even taking whole seasons to play out. During its five seasons, which ran from 1992 until 1997, literally every possible member of the X-Men (except Kitty Pryde, bizarrely) and X-Men rogue was featured in some fashion. The core team was made up of Cyclops, Jean Grey, Wolverine, Storm, Rogue, Gambit, Beast, and Jubilee, which itself reflected the X-Men team that was doing the rounds in the comic books of the day. But the heroes didn't stop there, with the likes of Colossus, Moira MacTaggart, Nightcrawler, Polaris, Banshee, Sunfire, Iceman, Havok, and more all helping out at times. Hell, even Deadpool had a blink-and-you'll-miss-it appearance, not to mention time-travelling action from guys like Cable, Bishop, and Forge. It really doesn't get any bigger or better. Even the villains were well represented, with Magneto having a raft of nefarious no-good sorts to call upon for assistance, not to mention rogues like Mister Sinister and Omega Red turning up to torment our titular team at regular intervals.

This show was everything an X-fan could wish for, with space travel, dimension hopping, time travel, and comic book arcs all handled expertly. For long-time fans of the funny books, it was awesome to see an epic storyline such as **The Phoenix Saga** or **Days of Future Past** play out in animated form, and arcs such as these made the series such a must-see for many. So successful was **X-Men: The Animated Series** that Marvel even launched an **X-Men '92** comic book series last year to tie in with **Secret Wars**, set in the same reality of the much-loved cartoon series.

### WOLVERINE AND SOME OTHER GUYS

Following the success of Bryan Singer's 2000 **X-Men** movie, all of a sudden the X-Men became cool with the masses once more, and, in particular, Wolverine was stealing the spotlight yet again. As such, nearly every X-Men cartoon that followed felt, for better or worse, like a case of Wolverine and Co.

or Wolverine and Some Other Mutants We Threw Together.

First up came **X-Men: Evolution**, which began in 2000 and ran until 2003. Despite pulling plenty, at least aesthetically speaking, from Singer's **X-Men**, the series bizarrely decided to make most of its titular team into teenagers. Sure, there was Professor X, Wolverine, and Storm as the adults of the piece, but Cyclops, Jean Grey, Kitty Pryde, Rogue and Nightcrawler, not to mention the newly-created Spyke, were all depicted as teenagers, with Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters doing exactly as it said on the tin, complete with lockers and plenty of other familiar high school drama tropes. Various other mutants would drop in from time to time, such as Beast, Angel, and Iceman, but the show's real lasting legacy was its creation of X-23. A young female clone of Wolverine created purely for



X-Men: Evolution







Wolverine and the X-Men



**X-Men: Evolution**, X-23 would prove to be so popular that she'd go on to become a regular amongst the X-Men comic book tales. Sadly, the show itself was a mixed bag, with many long-time fans struggling to get on board with the concept of what was essentially X-Men: The Teenage Years. The animation and style of the show were smooth, sleek and impressive, but the series just felt a little lacking, especially since fans would often compare it to the beloved series that came before it.

Continuing the theme of Wolverine taking centre-stage, the next series couldn't have been more about Logan if it tried. Starting in 2008, **Wolverine and the X-Men** by its title alone saw Wolvie positioned above his X-cohorts. In fairness to the show, it did try to give a valid reason as to why Wolverine was headlining, with the action picking up at a time when the X-Men had been split up. It came down to Weapon X himself to try and bring the gang back together, with him becoming the pseudo-leader of the group as a result.

**Wolverine and the X-Men** was actually a rather curious beast, with many of its plot points directly taking inspiration from the on-going X-Men movie franchise. Even though it should've appealed to fans of the cinematic series, plus the fans of **X-Men: Evolution** in how this show looked, **Wolverine and the X-Men** didn't even make it to a second season. The lone season, which featured familiar faces of the likes of Cyclops, Storm, Iceman, Rogue, Angel, and Jean Grey, was relatively well-received - the show's opening episode ranks as one of Nickelodeon's highest-rated premieres ever - and the ante was to be upped for Season Two. As a second year went into development, it was revealed that lesser known names like Magik, Havok, and Deadpool (yep, that'd be back when the Merc with a Mouth wasn't such a

big deal to the general public) were to be a part of the show. Sadly, though, this second season never came to be, with Marvel cancelling the show before production could properly start. The reason was due to some issues with some of their financial partners, and, as such, **Wolverine and the X-Men** was dumped. Luckily, Logan had some backup plans, and he'd tangle against Marvel's Green Goliath in the 2009 **Hulk vs. Wolverine** feature (part of the **Hulk vs.** movie that was split into two; one seeing the Hulk battle Wolvie, one seeing him tackle the Thunder God, Thor).

### THE WILDERNESS YEARS

Following **Wolverine and the X-Men**'s cancellation, all's been relatively quiet where a full-on X-Men cartoon series is concerned. That's not to say that our favourite mutants haven't had their fair share of animated outings, however. For instance, Wolverine was near enough ever-present on Cartoon Network's **The Super Hero Squad** during its run, and the show would even feature cameos from the likes of Professor X, Cyclops, Jean Grey, Iceman, and Storm at times. And speaking of Storm, she would find herself playing a key part in 2010's far-too-brief **Black Panther** series before that was brought to an end after just six episodes.

In terms of outings that weren't in supporting roles or one-shots, the X-Men were well presented during the **Marvel Anime** experiment. That particular movement saw Marvel Entertainment team with Japan's Madhouse studio to produce four anime-style Marvel series. Iron Man and Blade were both given their own twelve-episode shows, but the X-Men weren't to be left behind. 2011 saw the arrival of **Marvel Anime: X-Men** and **Marvel Anime: Wolverine**. Both also running at twelve episodes, the shows were decent enough, with the Logan effort being a particularly entertaining tale as the anime style was used brilliantly to tell a Japan-set story of Wolvie having to rescue his 'one true' Mariko. Even cooler about this series was how we got to see Omega Red and his crazy tentacles given the anime treatment, which in itself makes **Marvel Anime: Wolverine** worth hunting down. As for **Marvel Anime: X-Men**, which was also set in Japan, this time featuring the X-Men reuniting on a mission in the aftermath of Jean Grey's death.

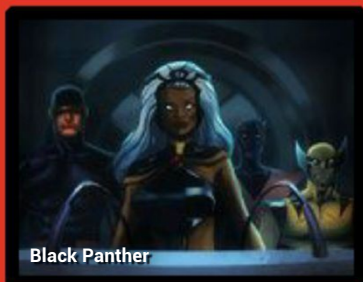
It's been a fair few years now since we've been given a proper X-Men cartoon series, with **Wolverine and the X-Men** being the last of that sort (even if that show was unceremoniously cancelled), and it remains to be seen whether Marvel will move forward with any further animated X-efforts over the next few years. Whether they do or not, the standard was firmly set way back in the 1990s with the excellent **X-Men: The Animated Series**. If they could match or even top that, we'd all certainly be in for a treat. In the meantime, let's just enjoy the memories. Snikt!



Hulk vs. Wolverine



The Super Hero Squad



Black Panther



Marvel Anime: X-Men



Marvel Anime: Wolverine



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# ENTER THE DANGER ROOM

*by Ed Fortune*





***Marvel's Mightiest Mutants have inspired many tie-ins and strange merchandise over the years. And any discussion of the X-MEN would not be complete without a whirlwind look at some of the games that have carried their names...***

The X-Men are an interesting choice of theme for a game. Not only do the mutants have their own, in-world games room in the form of their bespoke training gym, the Danger Room, they also have a games-themed enemy. Arcade is an evil genius and hitman who often throws various X-Men into all sorts of elaborate games-inspired death traps. Add reality-warping mutants and Marvel's usual plethora of strange characters (including a cosmic gaming addict) and it's pretty hard not to come up with an excuse to put Prof X's team into a game of some sort.

The early '90s were pretty much a heyday for cool arcade booth gaming fun, with all sorts of tie-in games from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles to Willow haunting the gaming centre. Konami's **X-Men Arcade Game** (back then simply called **X-Men**) had a total of six sticks on the cabinet, which meant pretty much all your friends could play. Playable heroes were Cyclops, Colossus, Wolverine, Storm, Nightcrawler, and Dazzler and foes included Wendigo, Blob, Mystique, Pyro and Magneto - pretty much the whole of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, which now we think of it, is a pretty on-the-nose name for a terrorist organisation. It was a side-scrolling game with each hero having a special power. Despite everyone bickering over who got to play Wolverine, the optimal characters were Dazzler and Cyclops, thanks to their blasting powers. It enjoyed a bit of a revival recently when it was ported to PlayStation Network and Xbox Live Arcade.

The uncanny protagonists are no strangers to consoles, of course. Retro fans still think fondly of 1989's NES game, **The Uncanny X-Men**. This one or two-player game was a pretty flat action battler that let you bob around the screen beating up robots and ninjas - the usual. It had some fun features; if you didn't have a friend to be player two, the NES gave you an AI-controlled buddy (usually Wolverine if you didn't bother with him yourself) and your special move cost you energy. You died if you expended all your energy and that's right, you could kill off your hero by trying too hard.

Another 1989 game was **X-Men: Madness in the Murderworld**. Featuring everybody's favourite loony Arcade, this side-scrolling affair featured some fiendish puzzles, which really did feel thrown in at random. Still, it was the only X-Men game available for the PC, Amiga, and C64 at the time. Its sequel, **X-Men II: Fall of the Mutants**, was much better, as it featured a host of playable X-Men and had a more JRPG style of play as well as some actual puzzles. Oh, and giant Sentinel robots, which are always fun to beat up.

The all-time fan favourite of X-Men video gaming is **X-Men: Legends** (both the original game and the sequel, they tend to get lumped together in polls). This 3D action role-playing game is for up to four players and lets you play pretty much the full roster of classic and 'new' X-Men. Significantly, it follows its own storyline. It's clearly inspired by both the movies and comics, but is its own thing, taking distinctive characters and ideas and doing something new with them.

The RPG elements allow you to level up and increase your hero's powers; special abilities, costumes, and characters are unlockable through play. It's fast, addictive and you can easily see why it and the sequel are regarded as the ultimate X-Men video games.

We can't talk about games that involve superheroes without bringing up **Heroclix**. This collectible miniatures game comes with pre-painted models. Each is based on a 'dial'. The dial summarises the hero's powers (along with a reference card), and you twist the dial every time the hero gets hurt or overexerts himself. For example, the Wolverine dial gets angrier (and thus more powerful) the more damage he takes. He can regenerate the damage of course, but overexert Wolverine or throw him into too much danger too quickly and he 'dies'. The manufacturers, Wizkids, have done some pretty nifty things with X-Men clix in the past. Not only can you get Danger Room maps and furniture, but they also produce an over-sized Sentinel model, designed to grip onto the other figures. Other cool stuff includes a very bloody-looking Weapon X collectible and a really nifty version of Nightcrawler in mid-teleport.



Heroclix figures can also be found in another game, Gale Force 9's **X-Men: Mutant Revolution**. It's a reskin of sorts of another tie-in game, **Spartacus: Blood and Sand**. In this X-Men version, you take the role of Wolverine, Cyclops, Magneto, or Storm, each of whom has their own team of mutants. The aim of the game is to form the most effective team. It has multiple phases; each phase allows you to get power and influence in different ways. Equip your team well (and get enough influence) and you end up having the advantage when it comes time for your mutants to fight your opponents. Despite feeling a little off-theme in places (the game really needs a Magneto or a Sebastian Shaw), it's a nifty (and rapid moving) little battle game.

Another game worth a mention is **X-Men: Crisis in the Danger Room**. Gameplay is pretty basic. Spin the spinners, get to 'your' archenemy, then beat them by spinning the spinner enough times. The thing that makes this 1994 game memorable is the 3D Danger Room board that slots together really easily. It's just about compatible with standard-sized models, making it a perfect little prop for other (better) X-Men games.

The X-Men weren't just limited to video and board games, of course. Table top role-playing has had the X-Men treatment several times, with multiple games (both official and unofficial) hitting the market since the '80s. To our mind, though, they got it right first time with TSR's **Marvel Super Heroes Roleplaying Game**. Obviously, because this game came from the people who brought you **Dungeons and Dragons**, it came in basic and advanced forms. All actions ran off a very simple chart, and challenges went from 'Feeble' to 'SHIFT X', the latter reserved for the likes of Apocalypse and Galactus.

You could increase your chances of success by being excessively heroic and earning 'karma points', which let you do pretty much anything if you had enough of them. The rules encouraged players to run a Danger Room-style scenario at the start. Though it was meant to cover all of Marvel's spandex crowd, the X-Men got a lot of love, with the X-Men supplement bundled with the core boxed set. You could also get to play as the main X-Men such as Wolverine, Storm and so on with the quick play rules. It was such an easy game that it was easy to abuse, but that was the point.

It also led to two of the oddest X-Men tie-ins we have seen: **Marvel Super Hero Adventure Gamebooks**. These were Fighting Fantasy-style books in which you made choices on every page to unveil a story. **The Uncanny X-Men: An X-cellent Death** lets you control Wolverine, Rogue, Storm, and Nightcrawler, who all decide to investigate a shadowy government body. Along the way, you fought the usual plethora of mutants, spies and ninjas and the whole thing used a stripped-down version of the **Marvel Super Heroes** game engine. Written by TSR staff member Kate Novak, it's a pretty workmanlike affair, but you barely notice because the "LOOK OUT! NINJAS!" style of writing is so much fun. The art was pretty cool in places as well, though the various full-page pictures did contain spoilers, making flipping through the book a hazard in its own right.

TSR also gave us another X-Men gamebook: a Wolverine solo adventure. Despite the cover (which features an angry Logan ripping up the wildlife), **Night of the Wolverine** takes the angry claw-wielding hero and puts him in a noir-style detective tale. In spite of some cracking artwork, the story doesn't feel very Wolverine at all. Fans at the time suggested maybe this was meant to be a Moon Knight book, but the lead was swapped out as Moon Knight isn't exactly an A-list hero.

We've only been able to scratch the surface with our favourite X-Men themed games; the heroes have so many cool ideas attached to them that many have inspired several games, be it a LARP re-enactment of the **Trial of The Phoenix** or a dice-based game inspired by Chris Claremont's comic book story **X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills**. Got any personal favourites? Send us a letter [see page 7] and let us know what they are!



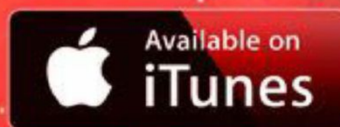


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# X SELLS

BY JACK BOTTOMLEY

n apocalypse is set to befall once again the world of man and mutant, urging Professor X to risk a migraine, Magneto to bend some steel and the timeline to twist further and turn quicker than Quicksilver on a waltzer. So as we look ahead at what *X-Men: Apocalypse* will bring, we decided to go back in time, to the beginning of the greatest war known to man and mutant.

The war on store shelves! Since tearing onto comic book pages in 1963, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's X-Men have had X-tra special appeal. Featuring intriguing characters, innovative action, and colourful - if occasionally gaudy - costumes; the X-Men characters are well suited to the barmy world of retail. So join us as we enter the STARBURST office cerebro and seek out the weird and wonderful merchandise of the X-Men...



(Toy Biz, 1993)

Toy Biz released twenty series of X-Men figures, with various vehicles, play sets and spin-offs in their x-tremely popular toy line. But in 1993, a Toys 'R' Us exclusive collector's set (limited to 75,000) was released - a rare find nowadays, going for some high prices in mint condition. In this set were Series One's Juggernaut, Archangel, and Apocalypse (1991); Series Two's Wolverine II, Sabretooth and Iceman (1992); Series Three's Sauron (no relation to the optic overlord of Mordor) and Magneto II (1992) and Series Five's Professor X and Cyclops II (1993). Though sold as a collector's set, many a kid was still reduced to tears when they found the toys were glued to a base and not play-ready. They gotta learn!



(Marvel, 2000)

This notorious toy, Imported by Rinco (The Rhode Island Novelty Company) is so inappropriate that many considered it a joke until it was confirmed as real a few years back. How do we put this? Seeing a child x-citedly blow up their Wolverine-themed toy by way of fellatio (they knew where they had put that nozzle) will always be Vinnie Jones as the Juggernaut levels of wrong. Moving on...

(Gentle Giant, 2014)

The master of magnetism, Magneto, will always be one of the most important and impressive villains in Marvel Comics history. His family, his powers, his past; it all makes the helmet-wearing mutant the perfect antagonist. So attempting to make Magneto more impressive is as difficult as explaining the *X-Men* film series chronology to a 3-year-old. However, the bust-making bods at Gentle Giant managed it, with this zombified version of the character, inspired by Mark Millar and Greg Land's Earth-2149 Marvel alternate reality. Mags swaps iron for blood 'n guts (though, technically, there is still some iron in that craving), as he becomes a frightening but cool zombie - plus he's lost a little bit of weight from the face and tum, eat that Müller yogurt!





(20th Century Fox, 2000)



The shape-shifting, blue-skinned, semi-regular baddie Mystique is a gal who has aided in both saving the world and destroying it, so you'd think any merchandise based on her would have to be eye catching. To that point, here is a something you'd be a right tit to miss out on. Mystique, portrayed by Rebecca Romijn in Bryan Singer's *X-Men* and *X2*, exuded sex appeal but these prosthetic breasts from the 2000 film are taking things a bit too far. Although, these unused props from the film have sold for up to and over \$500, and more are available through prop stores, so maybe we're the ones making a boob by mocking.

(Toy Biz, 1991)

This cyclops visor, while not granting you the ability to melt down foes, comes with blast sound effects when you 'shoot' your laser. The

imagination is a wonderful thing, and this toy/costume aids your youthful roleplay.

Ok, so you aren't gonna be the coolest kid on the block with these dopey visors, but nor was Cyclops and no one messed with him... much.



(Huckleberry, 2013)

Do you know what happens to a phone case when lightening strikes it? Us neither. The Chara-Covers collections come in all shapes and sizes, but one of the most striking is this case modeled after the weather wizard that is Storm. A character with a huge following, this cover (despite those slightly scary white eyes) is a thunderous addition to any Storm fan's - or the Storm Swarm as we like to call them - collection (if Storm Swarm was not a thing before, it is now).



(Toy Biz, 1991)

As far as X-Men toys go, Toy Biz is the be all and end all.

However, arguably the figure that popularised the toy line was Series One's Wolverine (1991). A common face in the X-Men merchandise out there is that of Logan/Wolverine, the Adamantium-clawed badass, who is the biggest name in the X-Men group and is the hero that marketers (and audiences) most took to. And with this action figure, fans got the first of what would be many versions of the Wolverine character in figure form. Coming with a detachable mask that doubled up as a neat ring, as well as retractable claws, this early figure is the place you start when you get into collecting X-Men merch.



(Thailand, 2013)

If you have been reading our merchandise features long enough, you should know the score by now regarding X-rated merch. Though we imagine this Thailand-made range of novelty condoms is clearly a case of the sex capital of the world having a right old laugh at this franchise's X-spense. The box art looks pretty cheap, and the bedroom activity-aided sheaths themselves look quite sinister - perhaps that is what the 'Long Shock' sub-heading is alluding to. That ribbed effect looks about as comfortable as the Deadpool character did in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*.



(Marvel Comics, 1993)

Gambit would approve of these vintage [since when did the '90s become vintage, for goodness sakes? - Ed] playing cards, which would look good

on the table of any self-respecting geeky gambler. Inspired by the X-Men animated series (1992-97), they feature the likes of Jean Grey, Mr. Sinister, Rogue, and other core characters like that fellow with the claws, his name escapes us momentarily...







(Toy Biz, 1997)

Everybody loves dinosaurs right? Well, that was clearly the thinking with these potentially exciting, but pretty nonsensical, series of X-Men/Dino crossover sets, which saw the X-Men transformed into bulky Neanderthals, with a dinosaur toy accompaniment - many of which looked like leftover designs from other toy lines. There's a reason these dinos went X-tinct.



(Toy Biz, 1991)

Generally, every hero has that one aspect toy manufacturers can capitalise on and create something that every kid (and often adult) would want. So it was, in 1991 Toy Biz released these early Wolverine claws, which were strapped over your hands. Primitive in ways and not durable enough to fight off a sentinel - or even the postman (though you could give someone a nasty poke in the eye) - but newer variations of this toy have not really changed the formula that much and despite the product's flaws, these claws were that step closer to kids becoming 'The Wolverine'.

(Marvel, 2015)

We all know the big, blue, hyper-intelligent shaggy scientist mutant Dr. Hank McCoy, better known as The Beast. And while this 59Fifty Cap looks like someone has skinned a cast member of *Monsters Inc.*, it's a rare sample and one that has gone for some big bucks in online sales. Coming with a scientific formula lining and the words 'Dr. Hank McCoy' stitched into the back, We're led to think that this isn't a sample at all but a hat stolen from Mr.

McCoy's wardrobe, so if you own one, keep an eye out for athletic blue creatures, he may be coming to get it back...



(Toy Biz, 1996)

Toy Biz has released some questionable figures amidst the hits (e.g. Ahab in 1993), but one of the weirdest choices could well have been Sack. Toy Biz's Generation X line of X-Men spin-off action figures (which only lasted two series) had a Series Three collection go into production, only to be cancelled due to low sales of prior releases. A couple of the planned figures got to prototype stage, though, as did this figure of the little known X-Men comic character Sack. For those that don't know, Sack is a gelatinous skeletal mutant, a founding member of Gene Nation and once held some young X-Men hostage. It is unlikely Sack would have been popular, aside from looking half microwaved, who really wants to play with a character that shares his name with a ball bag?



(Toy Biz, 1994)

Toy Biz has released some great playsets (X-Men Blackbird Jet, 1995) but one of the most collectable and brilliant is the sentinel robot playset. Standing at a mighty 14", these sentinel sets came with a retractable claw, mutant containment section and removable parts and were wonderfully replicated from the sentinel's appearance in the classic animated series. It may not have been until 2014's *X-Men: Days of Future Past* that we saw the sentinels onscreen (properly that is, we're not counting *The Last Stand* training scene) but long before that, kids were in awe of this well-crafted set.



(Marvel Comics, 1994)

When Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) and Erik Lehnsherr (Michael Fassbender) trained their 'Division X' team in *X-Men: First Class*, they could have done with this nifty stopwatch. Which makes an attractive collectable nowadays, despite featuring art of Wolverine, in which he looks seriously constipated.



(Marvel Comics, 1994)

Before pesky flat screens invaded, watches were king and this 'holographic' 3D watch was the X-Men's contribution to child wrist wear. From a distance, the watch/calendar face looks like Iceman has been messing with it, but up close, the 3D holographic (a bit of X-aggeration, granted) design, made this a fun novelty.



(Rec Sound, 1994)

From Marvel Comics' 1995 Wolverine X-Men Communicator to Toy Biz's Electronic 'Talks' figures (1991), communication has played a part in certain pieces of X-Men merchandise over the years. However, Rec Sound took things a step further, crafting an actual punch button Wolverine phone, which is certainly an upgrade from those drab red phones in years past. While great looking (look at Logan's big smile), the phone doesn't come with a message to unwanted callers saying "f\*\*k off" (à la *First Class*)... sigh... maybe one day.



(Marvel Comics, 1991)

Cyclops had some cool shades; these licensed sunglasses, however, are something that Colossus should sit on. Decorated with a Wolverine and Cyclops border, these quaint specs are at least an improvement on the usual cash-in toy, although the box art makes it look like Logan is stabbing them and Cyclops is kicking them; obviously, they were unhappy with the design!



(Marvel Comics Group, 1984)

The earliest released item on this list is this series of sew-on X-Men patches. One of the most striking (pun very much intended) is this Mohawk Storm patch, featuring the shower-summoning superheroine, as she appears in 1983's *Uncanny X-Men* #173, the timeline of which will feature in *X-Men: Apocalypse*.





# MUTANT X

by Ed Fortune



We're currently in a Golden Age of Telefantasy; we are spoiled for choice when it comes to horror, fantasy, and science fiction series, especially anything to do with superheroes. It's easy to forget that the popularity of hero shows is a relatively new trend. Fifteen years ago, things were quite a bit different, and fans would take anything. Let's take a look at **MUTANT X**...

**M**utant X was a Canadian-produced American TV series that dealt with a team of young human beings who had developed extraordinary mutant powers. Feared by the general public and barely in control of their abilities, they were assisted in their endeavours by bio-geneticist Adam Kane, a wise and skilled scientist. If this all sounds a bit too familiar, then you may be unsurprised to learn that the show's executive producer was Avi Arad, who, back in the day, was the CEO of Marvel comics. *Mutant X* was utterly unconnected to the Marvel Universe or the X-Men. Good job as well, because as we all know, 20th Century Fox owns the rights to Marvel mutants.

The whole world had been reminded of this when Bryan Singer's 2000 movie, *X-Men*, smashed onto the big screen and impressed everyone with its bold action scenes and flat-out geeky joy. Singer

had taken a property that moviemakers had struggled to bring to audiences and made it a smash hit over the years. While all of this was going on, Marvel had commissioned production companies Tribune Entertainment and Fireworks Entertainment to make an exciting new sci-fi series inspired by their popular superhero comics.

The show cast John Shea in the role of Adam Kane, the wise mentor. Shea was better known to geeky audiences as Lex Luthor from *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*. This disconnect, from villain to hero, actually worked as a genius piece of casting. Part of the suspense of the show is we are never entirely sure what secrets Kane is keeping from his students, and the majority of the audience were already used to distrusting Shea due to his other role as Luthor.

The actual roster of mutants

and mutant powers were of a highly convenient nature. No one seemed to have any ability that required too much of a special effects budget, which was very useful indeed. One of the show's conceits was that of human/animal hybrids called Ferals. These were humans with animal-like abilities (similar to Marvel's Wolverine and Sabretooth). This meant that they were normal-looking people with improved strength, agility, senses and occasionally the power to spout exposition thanks to a sixth-sense. The Ferals weren't terribly animal-like at any point in the show; it was down to acting bestial and throwing in the odd snarl. The main Feral in the show was Shalimar Fox, who despite the name was actually a cat Feral, played by the slim and leggy Victoria Pratt. Ferals didn't make that much sense, really; the animal connection was vague at best.

Other mutants were broadly split into





easy-to-film types. Elementals had the power over the elements (as the name suggests). In the show, we mostly saw this through the character of Brennan Mulwray played by Victor Webster. His powers were electricity-based, and he largely failed to use his abilities when an average person might. When he did remember to use them, he could fire bolts of lightning and even fly, which meant that his real power was to eat up the special effects budget.

Psionics could read minds and the like. Emma DeLauro (played by Lauren Lee Smith) was a Tele-Empath, which pretty much meant she could spout exposition when needed. The character starts out as a successful career woman, using her powers to make that sale, until Adam Kane comes along and recruits her into Mutant X. Of course, this means she got to develop the ability to invoke hallucinations in others and fire blasts of mind energy at bad guys. All it took was for her to quit her (well paid) job and put

her life in constant peril. Bargain!

Forbes March played Jesse Kilmartin, a 'molecular' who could alter the density of his body at will, making himself and others invulnerable. This was mostly seen on the show by Forbes' inability to react to dangerous situations (or possibly overact, depending on seemingly random factors).

Finally, the team got a new sort of mutant in Season Three. The well named Karen Cliche played Lexa Pierce, who had the power of invisibility. In addition, she could shoot beams or bursts of light from her fingertips and dazzle her foes. Pierce's invisibility was plot dependant, running out when it made the story more interesting.

This jolly band of mighty Marvel mutants made it their mission to rescue others of their kind from the evil machinations of a corporation called Genomex. This evil organisation carried out a series of highly dubious experiments on humans (mostly unborn children), permanently altering their

DNA. These New Mutants have grown up, and the world has noticed that there are mutants among us (rather oddly, since we barely notice most of the powers on the show). Genomex, under the direction of lead evil scientist Mason Eckhart (Tom McCamus), seek to harness the mutants for fun and profit. Another former Genomex scientist, Adam Kane, has formed the New Mutant Underground to save these people from the obvious baddies. His particular branch is the titular Mutant X.

That set up the formula for the show. The first season ran on a pretty simple 'Mutant of The Week' format, with Genomex trying to kidnap and control someone who has just gained their super powers, and the heroic Mutant X wanting to stop them. The show did have an arc plot of sorts, but it was pretty messy. Regular storylines included the search for a cure for the mutant condition, hiding the existence of mutants from the rest of the world (even though everyone







seemed to know they exist) and mind control pheromones, usually connected in some way to sexual attraction.

Season One was filled with nods to the Marvel comics in an understated sort of way. If you looked hard enough, you could see plenty of sneaky X-Men style references. The big bad of the debut season was Mason Eckhart, who was rather striking due to dressing in a white fright wig, white clothes and having synthetic skin. Eckhart's immune system had been destroyed thanks to his scientific meddling, and he spent much of the show looking for a cure at any cost. Yes, that's right; his supervillain origin story involved him becoming chronically ill.

Season Two literally swapped out Eckhart for a much more interesting bad guy, with Michael Easton chewing the scenery as Gabriel Ashlocke, aka Mutant Zero. The character had all

possible mutant powers and was also a psychotic killer. The series kicked off with a race to stop Ashlocke from achieving an immortality of sorts. This exciting new twist doesn't last for long, and we quickly find ourselves back to the formula. The third season was even more lacklustre, with much of the cast gone and much of the plot from the previous stories getting repeated for no real reason. A new heroic organisation, called The Dominion, was introduced to help out Mutant X. Of course, The Dominion was up to no good. The clue is in the name.

By 2003, things had gone quite awry between Fox and Marvel. Fox was suing Marvel because it had promoted *Mutant X* as a replacement for the X-Men. Marvel countersued, saying the two were dissimilar, and a settlement was achieved providing that Marvel stopped using the X-Men to promote *Mutant X*. At roughly the same time, Tribune sued Marvel for fraud and breach of contract. They

claimed that Marvel wanted Tribune to connect *Mutant X* to the X-Men. They also argued that Marvel had misrepresented what they were getting with their license, and the changes required to make *Mutant X* different from the X-Men had caused the production house to lose money. All of this grasping for coins meant that the show ended in 2004, after 66 episodes. The show also closed with a cliff-hanger, which is the traditional way for producers to express their dissatisfaction that a show has been ended before its times.

The fandom dried up shortly afterwards; by 2004, the rise of the geek had begun and *Mutant X* was broadly forgotten. Some fannish fun can be stumbled on, but even the likes of FanFiction.net and AO3 (usually hives of fandom) have very few works associated with the show, with the fanzine *Mutant Sex* stopping in 2005. As yet, there are no plans to revive the show, proving that this new Golden Age of Telefantasy also has a sense of quality control.





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# OUTSIDE THE BOX



## CLASS ACTION

The latest spin-off in the world of **Doctor Who**, Patrick Ness' **Class**, has begun shooting, and the BBC has announced the cast.

Set in and around the classrooms of Coal Hill School, the very school that first appeared in the first **Who** episode back in 1963, and recently returned as Clara Oswald's workplace, **Class** will follow four sixth form students. They'll be played by Greg Austin (**Mr Selfridge**), Fady Elsayed (**Silent Witness**), Sophie Hopkins (**Dark Matters**), and Vivian Oparah. In the role of a teacher who is also a 'powerful new presence' at the school is Katherine Kelly, recently seen on the BBC's impressive drama **Happy Valley**. All the Doctor's visits to Coal Hill have caused the walls of space and time to become thin, and something sinister is coming – something which could possibly cause the end of the universe – so let's hope these kids are prepared.

About this announcement, Ness, an award-winning YA author and this series' creator, said: "We searched far and wide for this amazing cast, fantastic actors who understand what we're aiming for with this show. And how lucky we are to get Katherine Kelly! She's been stunning in **Happy Valley**, **The Night Manager** and **Mr Selfridge**, just wait until you see her here."

Steven Moffat, current **Doctor Who** showrunner and **Class**' executive producer, added: "There's nothing more exciting than meeting stars that nobody's heard of yet. We had the read through of the first few episodes last week, and there was a whole row of them. Coal Hill School has been part of **Doctor Who** since the very first shoot in 1963, but this new show is anything but history. **Class** is dark and sexy and right now. I've always wondered if there could be a British **Buffy** – it's taken the brilliant Patrick Ness to figure out how to make it happen."

Directed by Ed Bazalgette, the first episode began filming on April 4th. **Class** will be screened on the now-online BBC Three later this year.

## New Companion Waiting in the Wings

After Clara Oswald's departure from the TARDIS, there's a situation vacant at the Doctor's side, but the position has already been filled, according to Peter Capaldi. He was quoted as saying, "There will be a new companion, along any minute, which I'm very excited about, 'cause obviously, I know who that is and we've been doing a bit of work together already and it's very exciting. Because it's a very different sort of take on it." Speaking about how this new companion will differ from Clara, he added: "Clara had prior knowledge of the Doctor. She was conceived as a human connected to [the Doctor's] timeline, and so had access to the cosmic nature of the Doctor. She understood a little about how he was, and as she was already with Matt [Smith], she knew the Daleks and the TARDIS. Now we have someone who knows very little about the Doctor." Whoever this new companion is, they'll be by Capaldi's side in Series Ten, to be filmed later this year and broadcast in 2017.

## Capaldi Asked to Stay On

Will the Twelfth Doctor be saying his farewells at the end of Series Ten, alongside departing showrunner Steven Moffat, or will there be more trips through time and space in store for him? That's still up in the air, though Capaldi has revealed that he has been asked

to stick around for 2018's Series Eleven, the début of Moffat's replacement Chris Chibnall. Speaking to BBC Radio Scotland, he said: "I haven't made my mind up. I've been asked to stay on, which is lovely, and I think Chris Chibnall's fantastic and a wonderful choice. To be perfectly honest, it's so far away in the future, and I don't – you know, **Doctor Who** is a very difficult thing to say goodbye to, and I don't want to make that decision right now." If he did carry on through Series Eleven, it would be Capaldi's fourth full series as the Doctor, more than any of his three predecessors in the revived series.

## Missy So Fine, She's Nominated for a BAFTA

Michelle Gomez's performance as Missy in the opening two episodes of series nine have earned her a nomination in the Best Supporting Actress category of this year's BAFTA TV awards. **Doctor Who** has also been nominated in the Best Visual Effects category, an award that the series won last year. The ceremony takes place on May 8th; best of luck from STARBURST to Gomez and to Milk FX, Millennium FX, Real SFX, and Molinare!

## Amazon Prime Exclusively Streaming WHO in States

One for our viewers across the pond: at the start of February, you may have been horrified to realise that **Doctor Who** had been taken down from Netflix, but don't panic, for it's now available on another streaming service, Amazon Prime; the first eight 'seasons', as we believe you call them, are available now, with the ninth on its way in the 'fall'. Throw your Netflix subscription in the 'trash'. Or shoot it with your 'guns'.

## Fans Break World Record

At the La Mole Comic Con in Mexico City, four-hundred-and-ninety-two Mexican **Doctor Who** fans broke the Guinness World Record for 'Largest Gathering of People Dressed as **Doctor Who** Characters'. Our congratulations go to the assembled mass of Weeping Angels, Time Lords, and girls in those dresses with the TARDIS on the front, and our jealousy to Mexico City's fez dealers, who must be loaded now. Peter Capaldi was on hand to accept the award, and showed his usual warm affection towards the fans, who know him as 'Doctor Misterio'. And we mocked the Americans for having weird names for things...



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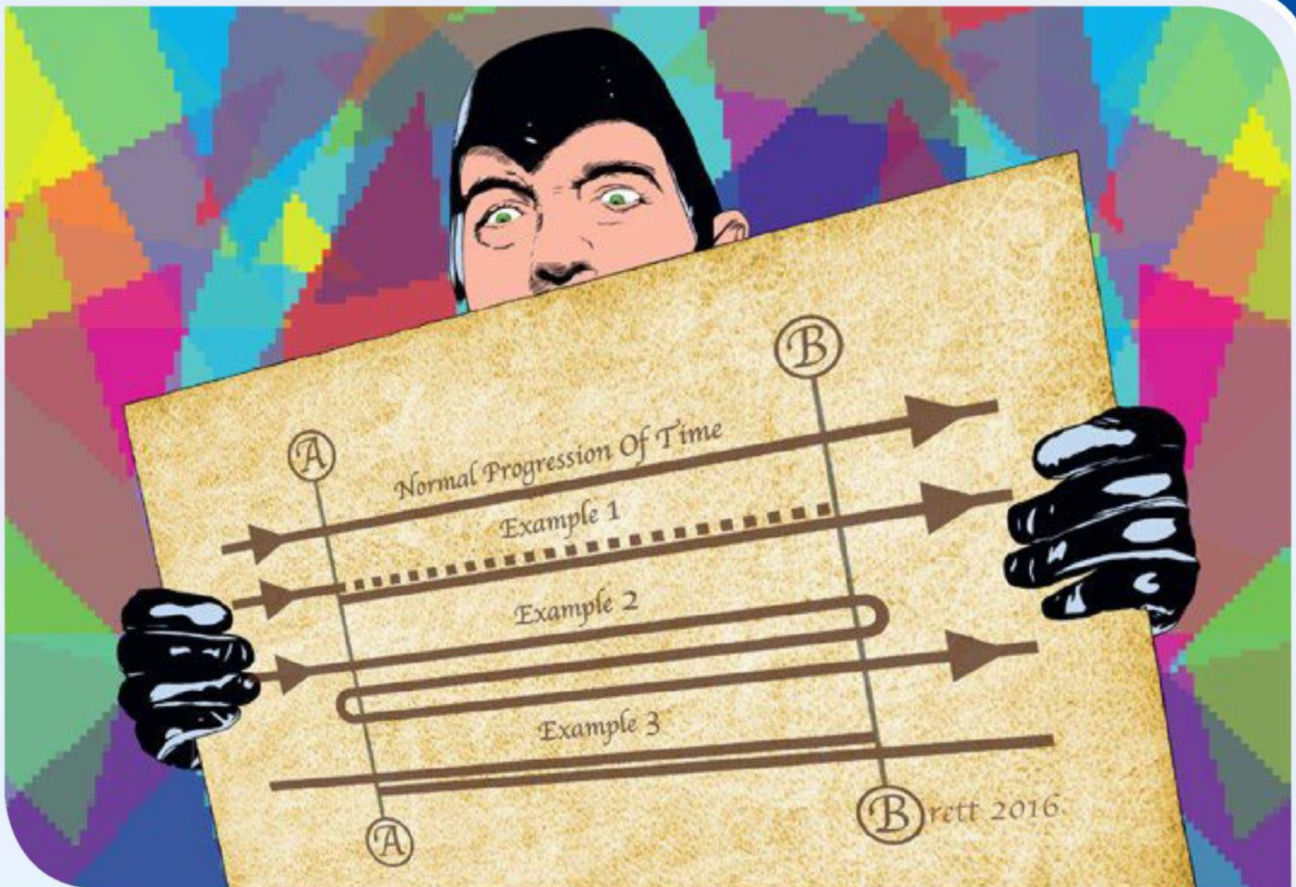
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# WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK  
AT THE WHONIVERSE  
BY JR SOUTHALL



A recent conversation with a friend about the meaning of the Valeyard's line "somewhere between your twelfth and final incarnation" in *The Trial of a Time Lord* led me to wondering quite how time works in *Doctor Who*. Have the changes Steven Moffat has wrought in stories like *The Name of the Doctor* and *The Big Bang*, for instance, made the stories of the past irrevocably redundant? The answer, in short, is no.

Let's examine how the Valeyard's existence isn't necessarily changed by the creation of a twelfth (or rather fourteenth) Doctor – my friend's question being, "Does this mean the Valeyard could turn up during any incarnation from Matt Smith onwards?" His thinking being that although the word 'final' referred to the thirteenth incarnation when the line was originally spoken, given that the Doctor has subsequently been given a new regeneration cycle, if taken literally, the line could now mean we might see the Valeyard being born at any point in the future.

But that's not how time seems to function in *Doctor Who*, so let's try and work out how it does.

We think, when we watch a time travel story – particularly a time paradox story – that once the events of the story have 'settled', creating a new timeline and pressing a metaphorical reset button on the old (or maybe a literal one, if you're watching *Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS*) that the original timeline is made obsolete by the one that has replaced it [main pic example 1]. But that isn't quite so. In *Day of the Daleks*, for example, although the guerrillas from the future basically achieve their aims and create a new timeline in which they aren't born into the same world as they would have been had they not made the change, for the Doctor, Jo and UNIT, those guerrillas still turned up in our present – and that *doesn't* change. In other words, although the timeline in which the Daleks invaded has been superseded by a new one, it must somehow also still exist. How can this be?

In order to introduce time travelling into our usual concept of time as a linear progression, we need to think of time as not so much a straight line, but as a series of parallel lines in which alternative scenarios can play out – not alternative universes, exactly, so much as alternative timelines within the same universe. When somebody travels back along a timeline, what they're doing when they arrive back at the starting point is creating an alternative line that runs parallel with the first, rather than replacing it entirely. Imagine, say, a length of string, one that passes from the past, through Point A and then on to Point B and through that and into the future. If someone travels back from Point B to Point A, the string leading between Points A and B is unaffected. But rather than carry on from Point B into the future, it loops around and goes back to Point A, before carrying on to Point B again – creating a new future that begins with the second iteration of Point B [main pic example 2]. The future that would have



arisen from the original Point B will now never happen, having been superseded by the future that begins at the new Point B, but crucially, both lengths of string that travel between Points A and B still exist, running side by side with one another [main pic example 3].

Everything that occurred prior to Point A is completely unaffected, everything that happens between the two points happens twice, and everything that would have happened subsequent to Point B will now happen as a result of the alterations made in the second timeline, rather than being the consequences of the first. By travelling back in time, the guerrillas have changed *their* future – but rather than ‘changing’ ours, have instead created an alternative version of it, which now exists as our own, but doesn’t entirely override the first version of it that would have happened if they hadn’t turned up. The first version of the timeline *must* still exist in order for them to turn up.

This version of time travel allows for apparent anomalies, like those at the end of the aforementioned *Journey to the Centre of the TARDIS*, or for two ostensibly mutually exclusive versions of the series to date to exist, following each of *The Big Bang* and *The Name of the Doctor* – the series arrives at the same destination, by two routes that are apparently the same but with important distinctions. And, of course, *anything* can be changed if there’s the possibility of somebody coming back from the future and doing it – hence comments about time being ‘in flux’; in other words, ‘our’ timeline might yet be the one that’s superseded by another.

There are plenty of *Doctor Who* stories that seem not to adhere to these rules, but this is usually only an illusion. *City of Death*, for example, is an odd one; Scaroth travels back in time in order to change history, and thus save his species. Of course, the Doctor – or rather, Duggan – stops him in his tracks, and history progresses as we know it always must have. What’s happening here is a variation



on what we see in *Listen*, whereby Clara visits the very young Doctor and by interacting with him brings about the universe as we know it. In both instances, the timeline we’re seeing on screen is the one that has already been altered – and the actions of the travellers serves to protect the new version of time rather than having it revert to a version that we haven’t seen (one in which the Doctor never dreams of scary things and sets out to fight them, or one in which the Jagaroth escape the Earth instead of causing life to form upon it). The alternative future we see in *Pyramids of Mars* is the version that would have happened if the Doctor hadn’t changed things, and the original timeline in that scenario would have seen the Earth destroyed in 1911.

There are definite examples that don’t fit this pattern, but by not fitting it they actually reinforce its legitimacy. In *The Big Bang*, the Doctor saves himself from the Pandorica, travelling back from a version of the future that could never have happened had he not saved himself, and

in *The Lodger*, it’s the future Doctor who tells himself to stay with Craig and thus sets the events of the episode in motion. In either case, it’s easy to extrapolate a version of events in which they would have progressed in much the same fashion without this interference – Rory unlocking the Pandorica without being told how to do it by the Doctor, or the TARDIS dropping the Doctor at Craig’s house and the Doctor noticing something strange, without him needing to read the card in the shop window first – but the authors of those two episodes have quite deliberately written versions with ‘impossible’ paradoxes in them (perhaps as a result of the future Doctor changing his own timeline in order to be certain of protecting the original version?), probably simply out of amusement. They’re like the fictional equivalent of a Möbius strip, or Escher’s *Klimmen en Dalen*. They take place outside the rules as established here, but by doing so only confirm that these rules need to exist.

So, what of the Valeyard then? How does he fit into all this?

At the time the line about “*somewhere between your twelfth and final incarnation*” was spoken, the new regeneration cycle (a point A for any changes that a future regeneration might cause to happen) had not yet been granted – and, crucially, neither had it when the Valeyard conceived in *The Trial of a Time Lord* storyline would have been ‘born’ either. His creation would have to have occurred at around the time of the David Tennant into Matt Smith regeneration – presumably *off-screen* – and again, this is before the future regeneration cycle is granted. Thus, no matter what changes to the timelines the Peter Capaldi Doctor or his successors might cause, the Valeyard can already be considered ‘history’ before the Twelfth Doctor is even born. No paradox, and the line as written still stands with its originally intended meaning.

Until, that is, some future showrunner decides otherwise.

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT







## FUTURE SOUNDS

The date of November 23rd, 1963 is forever burned into the collective consciousness of those of us who care even an iota about *Doctor Who*. But as those famous first opening titles kicked in, what the older generation lucky enough to have witnessed *An Unearthly Child* first hand may not have realised was that they were hearing something of a revolution in that strange electronic theme tune as conjured by the members of a secret enclave of radical sonic thinkers and musicians based in Room 13 at the BBC's Television Centre.

Retrospectively, the air of secrecy was lifted and we now know more of the activities of the Radiophonic Workshop than the audiences of the early sixties could have ever imagined. Indeed, their sphere of influence extends far beyond the confines of their contributions to soundtracking the adventures of the best known of the Time Lords (at least during that classic run from 1963 to 1989), which were spearheaded by Delia Derbyshire after founder member Daphne Oram exited stage left to focus on her own Oramics system just a year after the Workshop was established.

It was Ms Derbyshire, who'd joined by 1962, who realised the full electric potential of Ron Grainer's original notes on the theme, and impressed him to the extent that he offered her half the royalties on the finalised piece of music. Sadly, the higher-ups at the BBC denied her the privilege, though she became something of a cult posthumously. In fact, just four years after her passing, the Doctor was back, with current series composer Murray Gold making use of many

elements first embedded by his illustrious forebear in his own arrangement for the 2005 reworking. As he said at the time, "I used the electronic 'scream' at the start, the famous swooping top line, the organ harmony underneath, the bass line, and the 'time tunnel whoosh' at the very end."

Early screenings of *Rose* even went so far as to use a remastered version of Delia's original as supervised by Mark Ayres, composer on *The Greatest Show in the Galaxy*, *Ghost Light*, and *The Curse of Fenric*.

Whether William Hartnell ever knew the Workshop would be capable of creating

"the cries of strange birds as they wheel in an alien sky" had such things been called for is unknown. But their techniques, often shared by means of technical journals made available free of charge to the musically minded, would influence the likes of Pink Floyd (who would use what they'd learnt from a 1967 visit to inform much of the sound of their debut *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*, as well as utilising what sounds a lot to the trained ear like part of the aforementioned *Doctor Who* theme as a riff for part of *One Of These Days* from 1971's *Meddle*).







Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones popped by in 1968, and Roger Mayer, whose guitar pedals and effects can be heard on Jimi Hendrix's *Purple Haze*, were similarly switched on. Eddie Kramer, the man who served as recording engineer on *Are You Experienced*, *Axis: Bold as Love*, and *Electric Ladyland* also appropriated lessons learnt Radiophonically into his work with the maestro.

The good men and women of the Workshop had been around since 1958, tasked with producing new music and sound effects for radio. Self-explanatory, you'd think. And so it was that listeners were treated to the likes of *Quatermass and The Pit* and *The Goon Show*. Both featuring sound design by a young Dick Mills, who would go on to enjoy a long career creating 'special sounds' for *Doctor Who* beginning with a first official credit on 1972's tenth anniversary special *The Three Doctors* - including the doomed tolling of the Cloister Bell, which was actually a (quite literally) watered down gong that had first sounded during *Logopolis*.

**ADRIC:** What is it?

**DOCTOR:** The Cloister Bell.

**ADRIC:** It's stopped.

**DOCTOR:** Yes.

**ADRIC:** Well, what does it mean?

**DOCTOR:** Well, nothing, when it's not ringing.

**ADRIC:** But it did ring. Is there a wild catastrophe?

**DOCTOR:** Apparently not.

**ADRIC:** Well, something must have made it ring.

Indeed, it did and has been ever since to warn us all of impending universal collapse and assorted other wild catastrophes. Moving on from the bell itself to the ship, the TARDIS, in which it's housed. Ever wonder how that materialisation/dematerialisation noise you hear every time it arrives or leaves its destination came about? Answering the question is surprisingly simple. To do so, we

must turn to the man Mills replaced at the outset of his sound-bending duties, Brian Hodgson, who relinquished his post following *The Sea Devils*.

Using only a beaten-up old piano and a door key, he crafted a sound familiar to ears attuned to the comings and goings of time machines! As he told one interviewer, "It was standing up in the corner of the workshop with its strings exposed and I scraped a front door key down the bass string. We recorded that and added loads of feedback."

He would later go on to work on his only credits for *Doctor Who* as a composer, with the serials *The Wheel in Space* and *The Dominators*. Just by way of showing off, it's his electronic treatment of actress Sheila Grant's voice that makes the Quarks so distinctive even for a one-shot enemy...

As the Doctor moved into the seventies, the synthesiser began to take prominence in instrumentation, as championed by the likes of Malcolm Clarke and his trusty EMS Synthi 100. EMS, or Electronic Music Studios, was

part-founded by Tristram Cary, the man who'd previously lent his talents to the first screen outing for the Daleks as composer.

This music, or, at least, snatches of it, was reused in *The Rescue*, *The Daleks' Master Plan*, *The Ark*, and *The Power Of The Daleks* - and when he wasn't concerning himself with how the sons of Skaro and their world should sound, he'd also found time for *Marco Polo*, *The Gunfighters*, and *The Mutants* to round off an impressive set of scores for the first ten or so years of the programme his company would later do so much business over.

Peter Howell and another bank of synths - namely the Yamaha CS80, ARP Odyssey, and Roland Jupiter-4 - would be tasked with doing away with the 'musique concrete' of what incoming producer John Nathan-Turner probably saw as a dusty old theme. His version would be heard from *The Leisure Hive* up to *Revelation of the Daleks*, before being superseded by Dominic Glynn's sombre variation for *The Trial of a Time Lord*. Every incidental score from '80 to '85 was also handled in-house at the Workshop.

As the rot set in for the programme that had done so much to popularise its work in 1989, the veritable sound laboratory lasted nearly ten years longer. Its doors sadly closed in March of 1998, with Mark Ayres taking on the mantle of archivist after Director General John Birt's implementation of a Producer Choice policy, which, in effect, turned the dear old Beeb into more of a cut-throat business, with departments encouraged to charge for services from each other.

It was a policy under which the institution could hardly break even, even with five years in which to do so, as laid down in 1991. With reports of an online revival and even a New Radiophonic Workshop soon to be operating out of The Space arts project, led by Matthew Herbert. Could we be about to hear a marriage of old and new? If so, those birds don't sound so far off now, hmm?

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY





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## DR WHO: THE PETERLOO MASSACRE

**AUTHOR:** PAUL MAGRS / **DIRECTOR:** JAMIE ANDERSON / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH / **STARRING:** PETER DAVISON, SARAH SUTTON, JANET FIELDING, HAYLEY JAYNE STANDING, ROBBIE STEVENS, GERARD KEARNS / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Any fan will tell you that Doctor Who started out with the intention to entertain and educate; the time travel was intended as a way to allow the show to teach history to its viewers. These days, historical stories are a bit of a rarity, and the focus of them tends to be less than historical.

Doctor Who: The Peterloo Massacre is very much an exception to this rule. This Fifth Doctor tale focuses on one of the darkest (yet most frequently ignored) days of British history. 16th August, 1819 marks the day that the cavalry charged into a crowd of 80,000 protesters, who had gathered in St Peter's Field in Manchester to demand parliamentary representation.

STARBURST is a Manchester-based magazine and our offices are just a stone's throw away from the site of the massacre. We are well aware that the events of that day shaped the character and focus of the city forevermore, so it was with more than the usual amount of interest that we listened to Doctor Who: The Peterloo Massacre.

The story begins with a typical Fifth Doctor-style crash landing, as the TARDIS navigates itself into some trees, thanks to the smog of the Industrial age. The Doctor, Nyssa, and Tegan are quickly assisted by the locals. This includes rich industrialist, self-made man and regional clichéd Mr Hurley and his family.

The team are quickly faced with the obvious inequalities of the steam age, and Tegan spends much of her time pecking the ear of Mr Hurley's self-important son. Poverty is rife, and Nyssa swiftly befriends Cathy Roberts, a serving girl whose family are on the knife edge of destitution; Cathy has been invited to talk at a forthcoming peaceful

gathering, one fated to become deadly.

One of the nifty things about Big Finish's Doctor Who stories is that each tale feels like it could easily be lifted from the era it's a part of. The Peterloo Massacre suits the temperament and style of the Fifth Doctor perfectly. Davison's take on the Time Lord is energetic, youthful and emotional. He's a passionate crusader of sorts, and of course, takes the weight of the world on his shoulders, as he desperately tries to protect his companions from the bloody murder that is about to unfold.

Even though this tale has been crafted with Davison in mind, the same spectacle could easily be adapted to a television drama featuring Capaldi. It is certainly strong enough to make amazing television.

Paul Magrs has written a powerful drama, delivering a classic Doctor Who tale, which at the same time reminds us all of this important historical event. We should never forget what happened on that dark day in St Peter's Field, and Magrs has responded by crafting an unforgettable drama.

Required listening for any Doctor Who fan, and we would go as far to suggest that even if you aren't into Doctor Who, you should give this a listen.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★10



## THE BLACK ARCHIVE #1: ROSE

**AUTHOR:** JON ARNOLD / **PUBLISHER:** OBVERSE BOOKS / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

With over fifty years of history, and as many bumps in the road as there have been changes in style, Doctor Who is a fascinating series to analyse. It's with this in mind that Obverse Books have begun their series The Black Archive, in which each publication will spend twenty to forty thousand words picking apart a single televised story. And what better story to start on than that which

brought Doctor Who back to TV screens, after a sixteen-year hiatus, and set the groundwork for the popular phenomenon it would soon become?

This hundred-page volume from Jon Arnold comprises of four essays analysing Russell T Davies' 2005 series opener Rose and its place within Who history. First, Arnold explores Rose as a starting point for new viewers, comparing it to the successful simplicity of An Unearthly Child and the not-so-successful 1996 TV movie; he also makes some very insightful points about the character of Clive as a gently mocking representation of classic Who fans. Next, he analyses Davies' take on the character of the Doctor, and the decision to give him some proper character development, perhaps inevitable given the changes in genre TV since 1989. Third, Arnold talks about the character of Rose Tyler and Davies' success in making the companion an equal to the Doctor in terms of dramatic possibilities. And in the final chapter, he discusses Davies himself, and how the writer's crossing of populist sensibilities and artistic ambition crafted Doctor Who into the massive success it became.

Though it's not a long book, the first

Black Archives instalment has a lot of interesting things to say about its episode of choice. Arnold has a tendency to go off on tangents about other areas of Doctor Who history, but everything ties back into the episode in question, showing a thoroughly contextualised understanding of its success. He also brings in expert knowledge of what else was going on in TV and pop culture, and how this affected the revived Who – though an analysis of Rose's character arc throughout Series One in comparison to the narrative arc of an X-Factor contestant does seem to stretch the point!

Whovians wanting to learn a bit more about what made Rose so successful will take a lot out of this book. For those not so keen on Eccleston's Doctor, Obverse have released three other titles, covering The Massacre, The Ambassadors of Death, and Dark Water/Death in Heaven. There are so many more Who stories worthy of this kind of quality criticism, so we'll be looking out for what's next.

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★★★★★★8



WHAT WE'RE  
LOOKING FORWARD  
TO FROM THE  
WORLD OF WHO

# PREVIEW



## ALLONS-Y! THE RETURN OF THE TENTH DOCTOR

So far with their exploration of the worlds of modern *Doctor Who*, Big Finish has thrilled us with Kate Stewart and Osgood in the new UNIT stories, surprised us with Churchill, treated us to River Song, and stirred the imagination with John Hurt's War Doctor in the *Time War* - set stories. All good, but in May, they will spoil us further as David Tennant returns to the role of the Tenth Doctor, aided by Catherine Tate as Donna Noble.

There are three stories in *The Tenth Doctor Adventures: Volume One* (and who'd bet against there being more?), and they will be available in a limited edition boxset, or as individual releases. This gives those on a tight budget the chance to dip their toes, but we'd imagine most fans will plump for the set of three.

The stories cover a good spread of adventures and the cast includes many regular Big Finish names. First up is script editor Matt Fitton's *Technophobia*, in which the Doctor takes Donna to a future London and finds people are losing their grip on the technology they use to run their lives. There is an alien force lurking off-stage, the Koggnossenti (a name worth saying out loud), and all they need is for humanity to fall victim to technophobia! Among the cast is Niky Wardley, who not only appeared with Catherine Tate as Lisa Jackson to Catherine's Lauren Cooper, but also as the Doctor's companion Tamsin Drew in the Big Finish *Eighth Doctor Adventures*.

Bestselling novelist Jenny T. Colgan takes the action to the spaceport planet of Calibris in the ominously named *Time Reaver*. In the smuggler's tavern

Vagabond's Reach, a gangster named Gully (John Banks) holds sway, and everything has a price. Add to the mix the Vacintians, a race of aliens trying to impose order in the search for a deadly and illegal weapon, the Time Reaver of the title! The cast also includes Terry Molloy (Davros in *Doctor Who* and a regular in *The Archers*) and Dan Starkey (Strax in *Doctor Who*).

The final tale is James Goss' *Death and the Queen*, a love story with a prince and a wedding day. All would be well for Queen Donna, except for the host of skeletons laying siege to the castle! With no less than Death listed as one of the characters, all may not end well for Donna on her big day. What is it with weddings and Miss Noble?

Long term Big Finish fans will know this isn't the first time David Tennant and Catherine Tate have appeared on audio. Catherine took the part of Donna for the 2013 celebratory series *Destiny of the Doctor* story *Death's Deal* by Darren Jones.

David Tennant was a regular performer for Big Finish before his rise to TV stardom. Right back in 2001, he appeared as a Nazi officer in the story *Colditz* where he pitted his wits against the Seventh Doctor and Ace. In 2003, he appeared in two of the *Unbound* series of alternate history stories - *Sympathy for the Devil* (with David Warner and Mark Gatiss) and *Exile*. The latter gave us Tennant as both a Time Lord and a pub landlord! 2004 (the year before he took the mantle of Tenth Doctor), he appeared in five releases. He played the lead role of Galanar in four discs in the Big Finish *Dalek Empire* series and also opposite Colin Baker's Sixth Doctor in the main range release *Medicinal Purposes*. In nineteenth century Edinburgh, he turned in one of his finest performances as Daft Jamie alongside Maggie Stables as Evelyn Smythe and Leslie Phillips as Doctor Robert Knox. Can the Doctor defeat Burke and Hare, the infamous body snatchers, and will Daft Jamie survive? There's only one way to find out!

With this pedigree, it was surely only a matter of time before David Tennant once more made his way to the Moat Studios. Let's hope we don't wait another 12 years for Volume Two of *The Tenth Doctor Adventures*!

TONY JONES

**THE COLLECTED TENTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES: VOLUME ONE** is available from **BIG FINISH** on May 30th.

STARBURST





LIVVY BOOTE is...

# THE GIRL FROM X PLANET X



Growing up, *Pokémon* was my only source of anime. I led an unfortunate life of having never seen *Sailor Moon* - an amazing series following magical, monster-fighting girls - or any other, well, frankly, good anime. It was a genre of TV that wasn't really available to me growing up, one that I would have loved a lot as a child (perhaps even more than I do now). But it isn't just any old anime that I regret having lived without as a child; I wish, really wish, that I had been able to watch Studio Ghibli movies.

Disney is brilliant, as is Pixar (most of the time). DreamWorks has given us some amazing animation too. Lots of their movies have great female leads, like *Home* or the upcoming *Moana*. As a little girl, I watched Disney movies and knew that a woman could be powerful. But Studio Ghibli, well, it's just a whole over, level of feminist awesomeness. The women of Ghibli are pretty much always the main characters, and they are never, ever waiting for their Prince Charming to save them. They just go out and save the world themselves, goddammit.

The first Ghibli movie I ever watched was *Spirited Away*. More4 always seems to show it, so I had the opportunity to watch it. I was still quite young by this point - I think 11 - and it scared the living bejesus out of me. It was bizarre, confusing and amazing, and to be quite honest, I didn't quite get it. One thing I did notice straight away though, was that the main character was a little girl, trying

to make her way through a nightmarish world where her parents have been turned to pigs, working underage without really knowing what to do, and trying to hide her identity as a human being amongst a hotel full of monsters. I have always seen the frightening world of *Spirited Away* as a symbol of having to grow up too quickly, having to take responsibility in the real world, and understanding how unpredictable it is. To see a young girl grapple with this was inspiring, even if I didn't initially

understand what the film was about.

It was years later that I watched my favourite movie of all time, *Howl's Moving Castle*. Ghibli's female leads are always fiery, full of love and affection and a passion to change the world. They're natural leaders and Sophie in *Howl's Moving Castle* is no different. Some may say that Sophie is brought out of her shell by Howl; that ultimately, it's the guy that makes her the hero she is at the end of the movie. Well, firstly, not true - she takes matters very much into her own hands, whilst also reforming the rather selfish Howl. And secondly - a female character falling in love with a male one doesn't make her any less powerful, if she still has an interesting, independent personality from him. This is true of Sophie. This movie made me realise that a girl could fall in love, save the people closest to her, be sensitive and quiet whilst also being a strong role model and kickass.

I was 14 when I watched *Howl's Moving Castle* and it is still, to this day, my favourite movie. It told me that even someone who was considered by everyone, including herself, a wallflower, was powerful. And I'm not talking about a Bella Swan, an 'oh I'm so pale and uncool, I'm going to fall in love with a vampire and effectively ruin my life' wallflower. I'm talking about the girl who thought that she was useless and boring in every way, until she realised that she could push herself beyond the limits society had set her. Sophie doesn't try to jeopardise anyone



Princess Mononoke will save the human beings from themselves.



# Sure, FROZEN might be feminist, but it's got nothing on STUDIO GHIBLI's movies...

else's happiness to achieve her own, like you see in some films. Set in a beautiful universe of colour, nightmares, and unbound imagination, Ghibli provided my young self a movie that inspired me to be who I am today.

Ghibli was the beginning of an era for me. One after the other, I watched *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Whisper of the Heart*, *My Neighbour Totoro* (I'm still a sucker for Totoro merchandise) and *Princess Mononoke*, each and every one of them telling the story of women following their hearts, doing what they think is right, struggling with real life problems. *My Neighbour Totoro*, after all, isn't just about cute fuzzy forest creatures, though you do forget it when you see all the adorable phone covers, soft toys and T-shirts online... it's also a film about two young sisters dealing with grief and responsibility without their mother, finding hope in their imaginations and the world around them. *Kiki's Delivery Service* shows the story of a young girl finding her way in the world and forming her own identity, and *Princess Mononoke*... well, I'm not even going to try and explain the feminist significance of this movie. You'll just have to watch it for yourself.

Don't get me wrong - I think western animation has done a lot for feminism. In fact, I wrote an article a while back about it. But what's amazing about Studio Ghibli is that it consistently, without fail,



Nausicaä is the saviour we're all waiting for.

produces films where the women are the driving force. These movies show that women can be quiet and kind and loving and save the day - and that equally, they don't have to be sensitive or maternal to be interesting and realistic. Time after time, they come through, producing incredible female characters - I challenge you to find another film studio that does the same.

Studio Ghibli surrounds female characters with the most beautiful, sweeping music you can imagine, limitless worlds, exciting battles, and

challenges in a way that few female characters have been before; when watching Studio Ghibli, you feel like you are watching an epic, a love story, the most comforting and inspirational and exciting story you've ever witnessed, and at the centre of it are women. There are very few writers to this day who are 'brave' enough to give women the attention that male characters have received in literature, and Ghibli's Miyazaki and co. are a part of those few writers. Their stories have found their way to the hearts of viewers across the globe, the music and plot and characters of the movies so heart-warming, challenging, and beautiful that everyone, regardless of age or gender, has fallen in love with them. Men and women throughout every generation and country have seen the beauty in Studio Ghibli, and seen that female characters, that *women* can have their own distinct power. In the words of Miyazaki himself, "*Many of my movies have strong female leads - brave, self-sufficient girls that don't think twice about fighting for what they believe in with all their heart. They'll need a friend, or a supporter, but never a saviour. Any woman is just as capable of being a hero as any man.*"

Studio Ghibli movies have helped me become the woman I am today; they showed me that I could be whoever I wanted to be. If one day I have children, I'll show them Disney movies, sure, but Studio Ghibli will be what's on our shelves, there to inspire them whenever they need it. ✦



Sophie is a beautiful, strong woman, especially when she's old, so don't underestimate her!



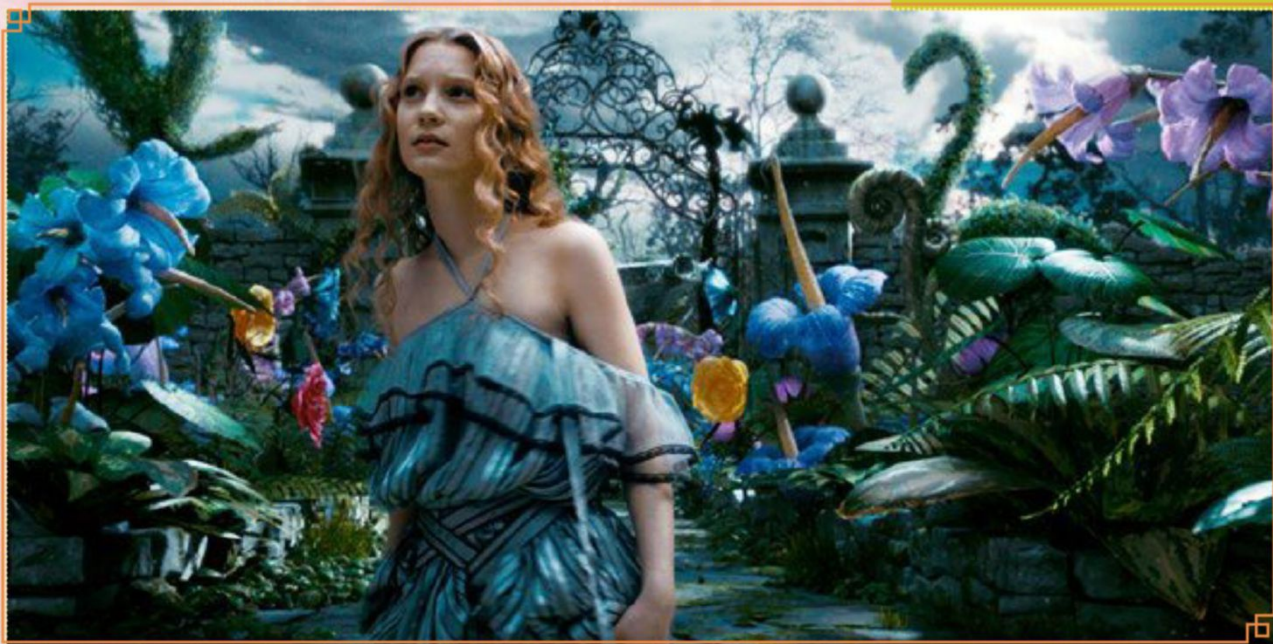
# Return To Underland

by Jack Bottonley

After TIM BURTON's first film ruled the box office, STARBURST stares at the mirror to see what we can expect from...

Disney  
**ALICE**  
THROUGH THE  
LOOKING  
GLASS





Back in 2010, the world prepared for what seemed like a perfect marriage of Tim Burton and Lewis Carroll (real name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) in Burton's adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*. However, Burton's film was, in actual fact, inspired by Carroll's iconic trippy 1865 fantasy *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and by elements of his 1871 follow-up *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. Packed with stars - many of them British - Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* was one of the year's most anticipated movies and, come the release, it showed. Making \$220.1 million worldwide in its opening weekend, the film went on to attain a global gross of \$1.025 billion and ranks as the 19th highest grossing film ever worldwide. However, Burton's blockbuster was met with a mixed critical reception, with praise going towards the aesthetic construction but criticism of the plot structure. So in the wake of a return to 'Underland', we ponder what we can expect from this sequel. And continue to wonder why a Raven is like a writing desk...

From the bobbing severed heads in a moat to the dark twisted trees poking from swirls of grey fog, there is no doubt there were elements of Burton's penchant for all things Gothic in his 2010 film, even though some suggested that Disney shackled the birds'-nest-headed director somewhat. This time, Burton is handing over the keys and labeled bottles to director James Bobin (*The Muppets*), as Mr. B takes a co-producer role. The plot once again takes influence from Carroll's aforementioned 1871 sequel story - although a fair few new cogs and bolts have been added to create a fresh twist on this tale.

The story details that have been revealed thus far tell us that Alice (Mia Wasikowska) returns to Underland to save The Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp)

and the realm from the evil Lord of Time (Sacha Baron Cohen). To do this, Alice must go back in time and fix things before The Lord of Time, alongside Alice's old nemesis The Queen of Hearts (Helena Bonham Carter), plunges Underland into darkness and despair. It's clear that *Alice Through The Looking Glass* will in many ways pick up where the last film left off, by centralising the friendship between Alice and the Hatter. For those who know the book, you will realise that outline bears little resemblance overall; though, we imagine, the mirror-accessible alternate world aspect in the book will remain, even if the plot is vastly different.

Despite its critics, *Alice in Wonderland* was a unique blockbuster, one that felt curious(er) and dark, with some striking imagery and an absorbing score from Burton's longtime collaborator Danny Elfman. It was a visual film and, while some chastised it as empty beneath the superficial pizzazz, the film was arguably an adaptation Carroll himself would have approved of. The characters, settings and tone were acid-trippingly frantic and it looks as though this successor will be in keeping with all that has come before. A lot may have changed but it looks like a lot will remain the same in Bobin's film - why change a billion dollar formula, eh?

In the aftermath of *Wonderland*'s success, Disney's decision to return to Underland was swifter than the Jubjub bird swooping for prey, with the announcement of a sequel being confirmed in 2012. Linda Woolverton was back at the writing desk and principal photography occurred at Shepperton Studios in 2014. Like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking Glass* will have a distinctly British identity, not only because of the largely UK-born cast, but also because of the very British eccentricity that unshakably







accompanies Carroll's characters. Indeed, Gloucester Docks was a location for filming, which will likely mean that the voyage Alice was taking in the last film will end at the beginning - or sometime during - this sequel.

To that point, we have made much of the visual and tonal similarities this sequel will have to its predecessor but moving away from it being adapted from Carroll or looking good, we ask: what can we expect from the story and the characters this time round? The inclusion of time travel and the peril of Underland may mean that steps of the last film are retraced in this one or that Alice's return to Underland will incorporate elements of her very first trip to the fantastical kingdom as a girl - an aspect only shown via flashbacks in the first film. The presence of time in this sequel could well mean that *Through the Looking Glass* will include elements of Carroll's first book and its characters that may have been absent in the last film. One thing is for certain though: Underland is still brimming with crazy inhabitants, as the starry cast that filled the last film has nearly all returned to the tea party!

Obviously, Wasikowska is back as the adult Alice and will continue her feminist approach to the character, with a plot that paints her once more as the heroic savior of Underland. Also back is Johnny Depp as the Hatter - a

weird mix of Madonna and Carrot Top - who will likely have a larger backstory this time around. In fact, that is all but certain, considering how the plot will be focusing on him and Alice's attempts to save him. Also, Rhys Ifans has been cast as Zanik Hightopp - the Mad Hatter's father - in this film, meaning that we will probably be reviewing the areas of the first film that were only lightly covered (the Jabberwocky's destruction of the Hatter's family in a flashback).

Also back is Helena Bonham Carter's big-headed and loud-mouthed Red Queen, who seems to be gunning for her Throne back with the help of Time. Other returning cast members include Anne Hathaway as The White Queen, Stephen Fry as The Cheshire Cat, Paul Whitehouse as Thackery Earwicket (the March Hare), Matt Lucas as Tweedledee and Tweedledum, Michael Sheen as Nivens McTwisp (the White Rabbit), Barbara Windsor as Mallymkun (the Dormouse) and Timothy Spall as Bayard the Bloodhound. Needless to say, it is a jam-packed crew and they are all up for another roam round the digitally rendered plains of Underland. However this return is tinged with poignant shadows.

In the time between films, English acting icons Michael Gough (who voiced Uilleam the Dodo in the last film) and Christopher Lee (who portrayed the Jabberwocky) have sadly passed away,





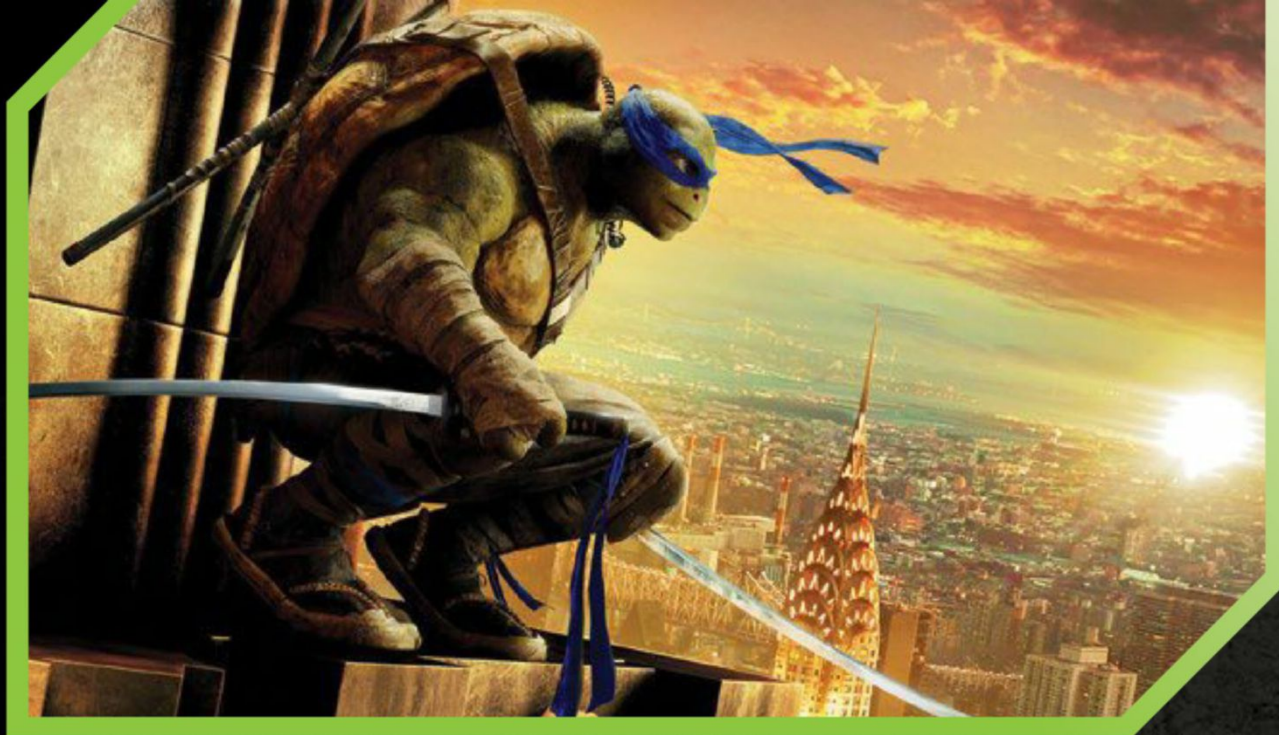
meaning their characters could be left out or only fleetingly involved in this film. However, more notably, this film will see the late, great Alan Rickman returning as Absolem the Caterpillar (or Butterfly, by now). He even features in the film's official trailer, and in a rather tragic turn of events, *Alice Through the Looking Glass* will mark Alan Rickman's final credited film role. If only we could all go back in time and retrieve these fallen cinematic kings. And to that point, Time is indeed a strong factor in this follow-up film, but then again it always has been a pivotal part of the lore of Carroll's Wonderland stories, so its inclusion into the very fabric of this film could well be very appropriate.

And that leads us back to the cast and the ever impressive list's biggest newcomer in Sacha Baron Cohen's time travelling, part-man/part-clockwork, steampunk-influenced antagonist Time, who producer Suzanne Todd has said is the 'kookiest' character in the film - no easy feat. Rounding off the newcomers to the cast are Ed Speleers (*Eragon*) as James Harcourt, the ever-excellent Toby Jones as Wilkins, Andrew Scott (*SPECTRE*, *Sherlock*) as Addison Bennett, and John Sessions (*Mr. Holmes*, *Legend*) as Humpty Dumpty. As to what parts these new faces will play (all will undoubtedly be revealed soon), but we'd wager a guess Sessions' character will have a great fall!

So, with a great deal of the cast back, a time-jumping narrative, a story taking even fresher approaches to the source material and Carroll's characters, it's safe to say *Alice Through the Looking Glass* could go a number of ways, figuratively and literally. We have been down the rabbit hole in 3D, now we go through time in 3D; with Danny Elfman back to score this sequel (after his acclaimed score last time) and sporting the same darkly Gothic and yet surrealist fantasy visual wonder, this sequel at the very least will look good. The last film had its fans and it had far more critics, in many ways, Burton split the public, despite the film's world-conquering performance. Expecting similarly earth-shattering box office returns may be a stretch, then, but anything is possible in a day and age where an R-Rated *Deadpool* film rules the roost and a bird-throwing mobile game can spawn a movie. Carroll wrote, "*Imagination is the only weapon in the war against reality*" and there is no greater place for imagination to flourish than in a Wonderland. Perhaps it is impossible for the film to blow our mad minds but, as Alice said to The Hatter last time, "*Sometimes I believe in as many as six impossible things before breakfast*".

ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS  
will be making sure it's not late for its very  
important UK release date on May 27th.





# GIMME SHI

BY BENJAMIN KAY

The Heroes in a Half-shell are back following the rather mixed reception to the 2014 reboot. Let's see if **TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: OUT OF THE SHADOWS** has what it takes to win people over this time...

**D**onatello, Michelangelo, Raphael, and Leonardo are about to embark on their second big-budget outing – the jauntily titled *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of the Shadows*. Die-hard Turtles fans were somewhat ambivalent to the first film in 2014. Director Jonathan Liebesman neither managed to really capture the feel of the comics or *absolutely* dump on the source material. Arguably, it was saved by producer Michael Bay's propensity for busting blocks and creating entertainment, even if fans were left scratching their heads and wondering what they'd just seen.

With that being said, are we in for a formulaic, bigger sequel, with higher stakes, greater struggles and questionable depth? Or will the addition of characters and lore complement the outrageous action and satisfy Turtle fans? Here's what we can tell you:

Let's start by saying that the Turtles franchise is as enduring as it is absurd. In May of 1984, Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird paid to publish 3,000 copies of a comic book that defied expectation. Gaining momentum, their strange creation started a frenzied avalanche that we all remember from the nineties – *Turtlemania*. Reaching a popular acme

that included cartoons, films, video games, and toys, Eastman and Laird presumably sat by with a look of absolute incredulity while every kid in the western world rushed home in time for Turtles on the telly. Thirty-two years later, our garrulous green chums keep on going.

Original TMNT comics were dark and offbeat, liberal with black humour and an irreverent, tongue-in-cheek awareness of entities like Marvel and D.C. And they were violent, of course. Unfortunately, we saw the Turtles dumbed down to make them more kid-friendly. Pizza, cowabunga, party dudes, half shells and that god-awful theme tune became the popular presentation of a much-misunderstood franchise. Here in the UK, the powers that be even sought to clean up the cartoon's image by replacing 'Ninja' with 'Hero' in the title. How was a fan to do anything less than plant their head in their hands and weep quietly? There was a little redemption though, in the form of three films in the early '90s, the first of which at least managed to glean a little bit of the mood.

Flash forward 24 years to a proposed script that succumbed to artistic reinterpretation – the awful habit of silver-screen adaptations. 'Let's make



them aliens to explain everything as tidily as we can', creative bigwigs bleated around some gigantic conference table. Instead of realising they had a perfectly good origin (and one spoofed from Marvel's Daredevil, which probably scared them off), they were bent on befouling the source material, and in turn, upsetting fans. Various reports that the original creators, Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird, were on board are best stored in the 'in what capacity, exactly?' file.

Impassioned Turtles maniacs had their say, though, and the writers relented in their approach. They only managed to muck it up a bit by making the walking, talking turtles the product of a scientific experiment. Still, the better part of valour being discretion, or in their case, *realisation*, they soldiered on and produced a fun flick, even if it didn't necessarily honour the source material. It didn't hurt that Bay's big-cinema style made for an entertaining couple of hours, and the film netted a cool half-billion bucks at the box office.

Jones. Jones was a bit of a nut in the comic books, donning ice-hockey equipment to dispense justice to the seedy criminal underbelly of New York City. With a good pedigree in vigilante-based thespianism, Arrow star Stephen Amell puts on the goalie mask and skates, picks up his stick and puck, and batters bad guys in an unlikely alliance with our four protagonists.

As the title suggests, events in this film are going to play out in a very public sense... even more public than the ending of the first film, which saw four humanoid turtles dangling from a falling antenna mast while onlookers gawped. Still, the stakes have to be upped, and spare threads from 2014 dictate reprisal in the form of Shredder and Eric Sacks. Fans of the comic will know Shredder as the walking food-processor/samurai leader of the Foot Clan, played here by Brian Tee. Eric Sacks was a character created for the first film as a co-antagonist. Sacks (William Fichtner) helped develop a



# ELLTER

All cash juggernauts cry out for a sequel. Wouldn't you double your dough if you could? So, we arrive at mid-2016, and the Turtles are back. Director Dave Green has been handed the reins for the second instalment, and it is written by Josh Appelbaum and André Nemec, who co-penned the 2014 film. Dave Green, an admitted Turtles fan, has apparently taken on board the successes and faults of the first and promises us a more Turtle-esque experience. Reprising their roles as the titular characters are voice actors Alan Ritchson as Raphael, Noel Fisher as Michelangelo, Johnny Knoxville as the voice of Leonardo, and Jeremy Howard as Donatello. We can expect more top-flight CGI and special effects from Industrial Light and Magic (ILM), because if there's one thing we can't fault from the 2014 film, it was the way the Turtles looked and moved.

The foursome retain their steadfast allies in Splinter (voiced by Tony Shalhoub) and news reporter April O'Neil (played by the unflinchingly hot Bay-bait Megan Fox). Splinter, a giant rat, is the spiritual father and mentor of the Turtles and for the sake of this imagining, fellow experimental by-product. This time, however, our ninjas gain a new comrade in Casey





mutagen along with April O'Neil's father, that would ultimately create the Turtles. It was the same mutagen that Shredder and Sacks intended to use nefariously, a plan that was thwarted by the heroes.

Although Shredder appeared to die when he careened into the ground from the aforementioned antenna, we can safely assume that he is alive and well and eager to carry on shredding. Sacks and the green goo, or mutagen, if you prefer, will add to the mix with the presentation of Bebop and Rocksteady – two characters created for the cartoon. Bebop, voiced by Gary Anthony Williams, is a mutant human/warthog hybrid. Rocksteady, portrayed by Stephen Farrelly (WWE's Sheamus), is the same concept but with a rhino. The two appear to be big and nasty and suitably dumb, just as they were in previous iterations. In addition, Tyler Perry will be playing Dr Baxter Stockman. In the comics, Stockman was responsible for inventing Mousers – autonomous robots designed to hunt and kill sewer rats. Bad news for Splinter, eh?

If this roster was in danger of sounding crowded, then the scales may tip even further with the addition of Krang. A mysterious entity from Dimension X, Krang was stripped of his body and

exists as a brain-like sack inside a mechanised robotic suit. Krang teamed up with Shredder in the comics, so it's only reasonable to assume that the same is the case here. A sky full of spaceships paints a bigger picture, though, and it's possible that Krang's appearance alludes to a significant and sizeable threat straight from his dimension.

The supporting cast for TMNT2 is equally weighty. Will Arnett returns as April's cameraman Vern Fenwick. Geeks will drool over Megan Fox, but they can double their girl glee with the addition of Alessandra Ambrosio as Vern's girlfriend. To pack in bigger names, several professional American basketball players are making cameos, including: J.J. Redick, Matt Barnes, and Carmelo Anthony. The Foot Clan are getting a little augmentation in the form of Karai – Brittany Ishibashi will

replace Minae Noji. It's rumoured that the high-ranking Foot officer will have a little more presence this time around.

So things are going to explode, quake, shred, shrivel, and be beaten senseless by a pretty large cast of creatures and entities. The Turtles, in an attempt to be the saviours of their city, must remember their Ninjutsu training and the wise counsel of Splinter to stave off threats, no matter how great or bizarre. To aid them in this, Donatello has outdone himself by upgrading the Turtle wagon to a fully-fledged Turtle truck, replete with gadgets galore and a nifty manhole-cover cannon. Not to be outdone, Bebop and Rocksteady procure a tank to battle their technically savvy reptile foes. It looks like we are in for huge vehicular action to go along with the leaping, ninjutsu-ing brothers.

Best guesses for the order of events are that Stockman and Sacks will unite with Shredder to take down the Turtles, creating Bebop and Rocksteady in the process. During the proceedings, Krang will make an appearance, splitting the attention of our heroes by threatening their city. The overworked four will find help in the form of Casey Jones, and after some pretty hectic action, the five will prevail united. Whatever the plot, we are pretty much guaranteed pizza, rap, gags and dancing to go along with the explosions and huge set-pieces. As ultimately strange as the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* may be, they certainly know how to have fun while they're doing their part. Let's just hope that the film's crew didn't get too carried away with the sentiment – they have a multitude of sins to atone for.

**TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: OUT OF THE SHADOWS** bursts into UK cinemas on June 3rd.





# HORROR Obscura

This month, the Mephistophelian Martin Unsworth talks to director Norman J. Warren about his classic fiendish film of evil goings-on in seventies Britain...



## AN EVIL HERITAGE





The late seventies were a boom time for independent artists. Punk rock was breaking the rules of how music was made and cinemas were bursting with small-budgeted films and larger movies made by directors who had risen from film schools rather than a studio system. In the UK, Hammer and Amicus paved the way for a burgeoning horror scene that attracted talented young filmmakers to find their own finance for movies, much in the same way the Internet and digital have done for modern directors.

Norman J. Warren came onto the scene in the late '60s with a pair of 'sexploitation' dramas, *Her Private Hell* and *Loving Feeling*. Both were incredibly successful at the box office, as most sex-orientated films were, but it was several years - 1975, to be precise - before he'd get the chance to make another movie. That film was *Satan's Slave*.

It's a curious story of a young girl, Catherine (Candace Glendenning, who had made an impression with her roles in Pete Walker's *The Flesh and Blood Show* and *Tower of Evil*, which was produced by Richard Gordon), visiting a mysterious uncle (played by the wonderful Michael Gough) with her mother and father. Tragically, just as they get there, they crash and her parents perish in the fiery car. Uncle Alexander takes Catherine in and looks after her while she's in shock. It's here she meets his son, Stephen (Martin Potter, an amazing talent of the time who starred in several cult classics such as *Goodbye Gemini* among others) and Frances (Barbara Kellerman). As she convolutes in the opulent grounds of Alexander's home, she becomes very close to Stephen. However, we've already seen a darker side to him and his family. In the opening scenes, a woman is sacrificed in an occult ceremony, and we've witnessed Stephen trap the head of one of his lady friends in a door when she takes exception to his attempted rape. We can sense quite clearly that young Stephen is more than a few slates short of a full roof. Laughing maniacally on a bed will always give that impression.

Catherine, in the meantime, is suffering hallucinations and feelings of dread, but she is certainly not prepared for the warning Frances has for her. She is to be sacrificed, apparently, in an attempt to resurrect an ancestor, Camilla York (played by Glendenning in the flashbacks) using Catherine's body as a vessel. Camilla was said to be a potent witch and Alexander plans to utilise her revived powers for his own evil doing.

Trying to help her escape, Frances falls foul of Stephen and is left hanging around on the back of a door (via a knife through her throat) and Catherine is locked away to await the terrible ritual. We won't spoil the ending any more, but rest assured there's still some great surprises.

*Satan's Slave* was written by David McGillivray, who is best known for his work with Pete Walker (*House of Whipcord*, *Frightmare*, and *House of Mortal Sin* and still very much active in the business) and epitomises the grittier side of British horror cinema of the seventies: copious amounts of Kensington Gore, plenty of naked ladies, and an atmospheric and striking score (by the legendary John Scott).

To fully get a feel for the movie, we spoke to director Norman J. Warren; we began by asking how he managed to arrange financing for the film. "Initially, we did shop around, we went to a few distributors who were half interested, but not that committed. We then started going to private individuals and after a while we did find one or two that were interested, but we got to the stage where we would have fifty percent of the money, but we'd have to go and find the other



fifty percent. By the time we found our half, the people putting up the first fifty percent had changed their mind! That went on for over a year. The other thing that was a nuisance was dealing with people who had nothing to do with the business, they always wanted to make changes to the script - and some of those changes were quite ridiculous. In the end, it got so frustrating, and we were getting absolutely nowhere, Les Young, who was the cameraman and producer, basically just said 'Why don't we just try and do it anyway?' We ended up with £15,000 in cash and had a lot of favours coming in from companies and people all agreeing to work for small fees."

This cost-cutting even extended to the director himself, "I was already an editor - I'd been doing that for some years - I agreed to do that to save money. I'm not credited as such on the film because in those days, film shoots were very much controlled by the unions and you were not allowed to do two jobs! So there's no editing credit at all! Strangely enough, the union never actually asked why there was none!"

As mentioned, *Satan's Slave* came quite a few years after Norman's initial success, and was his first horror thriller. He explained the delay, "It really happened out of frustration of other things not happening. I was meant to be doing a film for Amicus called **The Book of Seven Seals** but after endless meetings with [Amicus head] Milton Subotsky, they decided not to go ahead with it. That was a disappointment, but the big one for me was a film called **The Naked Eye**, which was for American International Pictures (A.I.P.) and it would have starred Vincent Price. That went on for about eighteen months and over that time they kept putting the budget up a bit, and in the end turned around and said this film's too expensive! It was such an enormous disappointment at the time for everybody. It would have been so exciting working with Vincent, as he was such an enormous star at that time. You never know in life what's going to happen; had I done that film, my whole career could have taken another route."

This is a situation that rings true even today, as Norman continues, "I feel sorry for young directors now, they are given some opportunities now that look great on paper, but if it goes wrong, you'll never get asked again. You get a lot of first time directors who make one film and you never hear of them again! It's all to do with box office. I was so lucky, really, because when I did **Her Private Hell**, the subject was still rather difficult, even though the film was so naïve; but they publicised it on the sex, and it made a fortune. As a result, it was a wonderful start for me - you can't do better than make money. I'm happy to say, all my films - with the exception of **Bloody New Year** (1987) - have made money."

The film opens with the most evocative credits sequence, with an animated skull, something that sets the tone and also makes the film stand out from similar movies of the time, "They were all the idea of Hayden Pearce, who was the art director," Norman tells us, "one of the most talented people I've ever known. I've worked with Hayden on everything including documentaries and commercials. He animated and shot it himself over a weekend, including doing the artwork as well." This is set perfectly to the haunting music of John Scott, "That's another thing in itself - John Scott's such a talented musician. The score is actually such a very simple piece of music, but the way he does it, it goes into your mind and you can actually remember it! It's a simple theme, but it works."

An element of the film that provides some rich atmosphere and an impression of a much larger budget, is the location. A grand house in the middle of







woodland is an ideal hideaway for someone looking to conduct occult rituals. Norman told us, "That was once again Hayden - he was searching out properties, and to be honest, we were getting pretty desperate, we couldn't find anywhere. Most places were not suitable or the people were not interested. And because we didn't have any money, we needed a house that also had furniture in it. Hayden was ringing everyone he knew in connection to art departments and someone suggested the mock Tudor house in Pirbright, and we couldn't believe our luck. Not only did it look great outside but everything in there was genuine - there was wall-to-wall paintings and it was fully dressed. The people were quite happy for us to use it. There was five acres of land including those woods, and another bonus was we found there was a sub-station there. We got in touch with the electricity company and we were able to get as much power as we needed from that." It was a find that both Norman and other filmmakers were keen to utilise again, "It subsequently got used by other people; it was in *Virgin Witch*, and, of course, we used it again for *Terror*. It was too good a location to lose. It belonged to a Baron and Baroness, and they didn't mind what we did. We didn't damage the place at all, we were very careful and when we finished, we sent in a team of cleaners and it looked better than when we'd arrived! They were an elderly couple, so there were cobwebs everywhere. You'd never actually find it if you tried, it was so tucked away - which was also a bonus for us."

There was one issue with the setting as they found out when filming began, as Norman tells us, "There was no problem with sound except Pirbright is right next to the military establishment. We only found out when we started filming that every Tuesday and Thursday, they used to play wars, and they would blow things up outside and fire off cannons. We were filming on our second day outside and it sounded like a war had started; we had to stop and go back inside because we couldn't hear a thing."

This in itself had an added bonus, "We came to film the car crash - when it bursts into flames - we actually did that on the military land." Norman continues, "The problem with blowing a car up like that is you have to do it safe, of course, but you have to get rid of it afterwards. That would be extra expense, but we talked to the military and they let us do it there; they didn't mind us leaving it as they could shoot it up afterwards."

The cast of *Satan's Slave* are exemplary, and Norman has nothing but good memories of working with them. Michael Gough, in particular, "He was an absolute joy, a really lovely man. He just joined in with everything, and was always word perfect, so professional. He never complained, and we worked some unbelievable hours." There was also no 'superstar' ego with the legendary actor, "We had him for three weeks, and he lived in Norfolk at the time, and we couldn't afford a hotel or anything and he said 'Don't worry, I've got a friend and I can stay with them'. So he slept on their couch, and we'd pick him up at 5.30am and he was squashed in the back of an old Ford Escort - we had no limos! We usually worked until about midnight, and we'd stop off on the way back and buy fish and chips to eat in the car and that was dinner! He actually seemed to enjoy it."

This lack of budget extended to the basic things on the film, too. Including what the characters wore, as Norman explains, "Apart from the opening scene in which he's wearing the satanic robes, everything



else he was wearing were his own clothes. I said to him at the beginning, 'We haven't got any money for wardrobe', and he suggested wearing his own. The next day, he came to my front door with two suitcases with his entire wardrobe, and promptly put things on and said 'tell me what you like'."

The other male lead, Martin Potter, was another blessing for the film. "We really got lucky there, as Michael Gothard (*The Devils*) was going to do our film, but right at the last minute he backed out. We were in a desperate position so rang round some agents and they suggested Martin Potter, who'd just finished shooting *The Legend of Robin Hood* for TV. He just became the character. It's a part that if you got it wrong, it would be very silly, and it's like a controlled madness. You just never know when he's going to change."

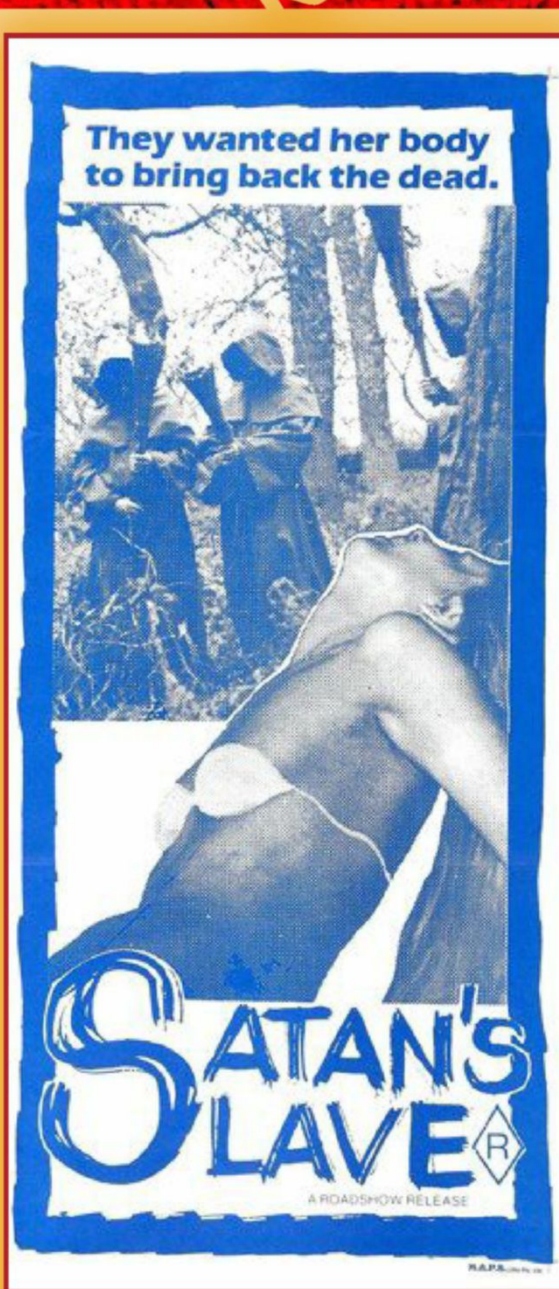
Potter not only played a visually striking character, his intense looks also made him a compelling screen presence and did draw attention when the crew went out, "His eyes are really something else. We used to go and have lunch at the local pub; Martin was actually on TV with the Robin Hood show at that time. So his face was well known to people, and a lot would come into the bar while we were there and they'd make jokes about it. Most days Martin would take it well and smile but sometimes if he wasn't in the mood, he'd give a look with his eyes and people would just run off!"

Although the film was made with a low budget, the make-up effects were amazing. They were the work of Robin Grantham and Nick Maley, and there was one particular effect that Norman remembers well, "The thing that was a work of art on *Satan's Slave* was when Martin Potter gets the nail file in the eye, that stands up pretty well in a still, which is always a good sign with make-up. There's actually a false eye in front of Martin's eye that has a support to hold the nail file in place. Then you have all the eyelids and eyelashes and face built up on top. There's also a blood supply to the eye, which goes under the hair, round the ear and down the face; the fact we managed to get all that on Martin's face without it sticking out - it would have been completely out of balance. It is a bit bigger, but it stands up in a close-up. It's a remarkable achievement."

Following post-production, which, as Norman explained, was a nightmare since he was attempting to edit the footage on rented equipment in his house at all hours, the film was picked up for distribution by Brent Walker. It got the film out to an audience, but wasn't the best situation, as Norman tells us, "We did ok, but they did kind of rip us off. We did get enough back to pay everyone off, and eventually we got some money back, and enough for them to say 'you can do another one'. They did very well out of it, they put it out three times."

UK audiences can enjoy *Satan's Slave* again, or discover it for the first time, as the rights reverted back to Norman after the Brent Walker deal ended. It will also make an appearance on UKTV, so it will no doubt gain a whole new legion of fans. It's something Norman is more than thrilled about, "Out of all of my films, it seems to be one that people like - they are always wanting to talk about it, and I have fond memories of it."

*SATAN'S SLAVE* is screened April 23rd on Horror Channel Sky 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138.

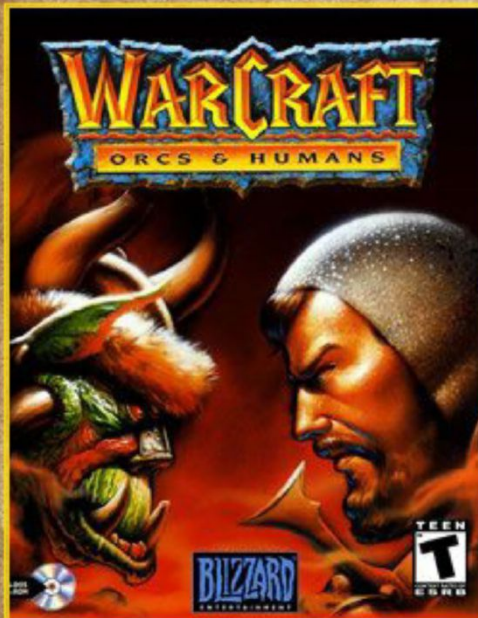




# THE WORLDS OF WARCRAFT

by Ed Fortune

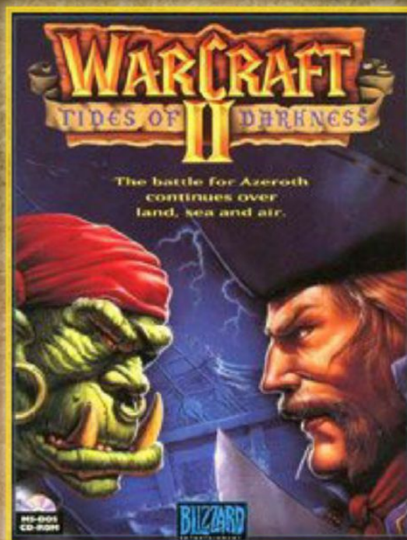
Blizzard Entertainment's WARCRAFT is a global phenomenon. Although a household name, the forthcoming movie is based on the humble 1994 video game that kicked it all off. Let's take a look at the worlds (and games) that have made it the iconic property that it is today...



**W**arcraft: Orcs & Humans is a real-time strategy game that is playable on a PC and Mac. Back in the early '90s, RTS games were a growing trend. Westwood studios had already broken new ground with their science fiction strategy game *Dune*, based on the classic Frank Herbert novel. Westwood went on to explore the futuristic angle further with their very popular *Command and Conquer* series, so it made sense that Blizzard would go in the other direction with a fantasy setting. The game would bear the basic design elements of an RTS game; gather resources, build troops, attack the foe in order to win more resources and the game itself.

The mechanics and setting of *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* are strongly inspired by tabletop fantasy gaming, levelling and spell research are elements taken straight from this source. The developers did initially investigate working with British wargames factory Games Workshop in order to give the





whole game a more 'authentic' feel. After all, part of the success of *Dune* came from its association with Frank Herbert's classic novel (and the cult movie it spawned). However, the project heads had not enjoyed their previous experience working with tie-in brands, (such as DC's Justice League Task Force) and were not prepared to hand creative control over to a third party. The result was a game that was heavily informed by the gritty and decidedly European approach to fantasy. Grim war and struggle, with magic being yet another thing to deal with, rather than an easy way to solve problems.

Games Workshop would, of course, attempt to enter the video games market about a decade later and do so extremely well. However, had Blizzard taken this approach, it's unlikely they'd have been allowed to develop their product the way they have. The creative freedom granted by going their own way far out-weighed the advantage of initial brand recognition.

Like most RTS games, it had a plot,

though a chunk of the story came from the game's manual, rather than the game itself. As the name suggests, the game was about an invasion of Orcs into human lands. This is no mere war of nations, however. The Orcs come from another world, Draenor, where there is only war and blood. An Orcish Warlock is able to take a break from the constant struggle and threat of demonic horrors in order to research the origins of magic. In doing so, it finds a portal leading to a lush and peaceful land, returning to his Orcish friends with strange plants as evidence of his discovery. This new land, referred to by its human inhabitants as 'Azeroth' seems a ripe jewel for the plucking.

The Orcs enlarge the portal, arrive in paradise and proceed to massacre a peaceful human village. The raiding party returns with lots of loots and claims that mankind is defenceless. The result is war, with humans getting their act together to defend against the Orcish hordes. As the war rages, the Orcs find themselves allying with Necromancers in

order to match the human knights.

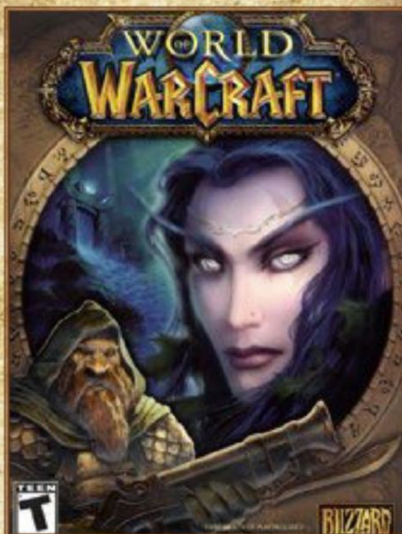
If all of this sounds a little bit like the plot of the forthcoming movie, then you shouldn't be surprised. Though subsequent games expanded on the background and set-up for the first game (which, once we remove the magic portals, had a pretty simple plot), this tale of magical invasion is the core story behind *Warcraft* and it seems likely that Blizzard hopes to develop the movie brand (and storyline) along familiar lines.

1995's PC game *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness*, expanded the tale even further. As the name suggests, naval battles were added (as well as a new resource to gather, oil). The sequel follows on pretty much from the first game. The humans have lost much of their lands to the Orcs, who have become an unbeatable horde. Gaining new allies from the elvish lands, an Alliance is formed to take on the Horde. The names, Alliance and Horde, would become the franchise's two main factions at this point. The story ends with the Orcs





Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos



World Of Warcraft



Hearthstone

routed and firmly defeated and the portal closed. However, the Alliance is in disarray thanks to the savagery of the humans and their refusal to take prisoners. Some of the Horde, it seems, have survived and the story of the portal is left hanging. Again, the naval elements of this game are ripe for motion picture development. Should the first movie be a success, it seems likely that the broad setting will be used to explore Azeroth even further, and we haven't as yet seen steam-powered pirate Orcs on the silver screen, so there's something to look forward to.

The next game, sadly, was not to be. 1997's *Warcraft Adventures* was intended as a dark, comical adventure game in the same vein of the likes of *Day of The Tentacle* and *Monkey Island*. It was designed by *Hitchhiker's Guide to The Galaxy* game creator Steve Meretzky, with tie-in novelist Christie Golden being responsible for the book of the game. The problem was that by the time the game was ready to market, other companies had produced far better looking and smoother playing games. The result was a stale-looking product and Blizzard decided to pull the product rather than risk bringing something less than excellent to market.

The tale focused on the Orc hero Thrall, who would become a core character in 2003's *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos*. By now, Blizzard had a handle on both the setting and game design. *Warcraft III* was a leap both in terms of story and technology. Sequences of the RTS game were entirely RPG style, with the player controlling one hero and guiding them through story specific encounters, though the usual build and invade game was also present. Cut scenes and better graphics meant for better storytelling, and the world of Azeroth deepened.

At this point in the series, the true villains of *Warcraft* have been revealed. The demonic Burning Legion are creatures from the hell realms who seek to undo the many worlds of creation. It was they who sent the Orc horde to Azeroth, and when they failed, abandoned them to their fate.

*Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* pretty much lays the foundation for *Warcraft* as we know it. Thrall and allies found an Orcish nation on Azeroth, the highborn elves fall to infernal temptation and become the beings known as Blood Elves. The woods-loving Night Elves lose much of their power in an attempt to drive back the demonic forces, and an undead nation is founded (well, brought back from the dead, really), thanks in part to the betrayal and stupidity of the humans.

If this all seems like a bit of an info dump, it totally is (and we are trying to avoid the obvious spoilers, though it's hard given the global scale and popularity of the game). *Reign of Chaos* is potentially a movie series in its own right; so much happens and it's told through multiple perspectives all the way through. It is the backbone of the



setting and required playing for any true *Warcraft* fan. It also paved the way for 2004's *World of Warcraft*, an MMORPG that barely needs an introduction.

Shedding its RTS origins to become an interactive roleplaying experience, the setting for *World of Warcraft* is deep and comprehensive, but builds on the environment and history from the previous games. Of interest to movie fans, however, is the expansion of Pandaria and The Broken Lands. The former is a mystical, oriental style land filled with Panda-like samurai that bears more in common with Kung-Fu Panda than it does *Warcraft*, populated with rabbit people and mantis men. The Broken Lands are the realms in which the demons lurk (presumably the commute from the Hell-like Twisting Nether is murder in the mornings). The well of inspiration is deep in the *World of Warcraft*, and if the movie series ever

gets this far, then it's likely that they would go in their own direction.

Rounding off is 2014's *Hearthstone*, Blizzard's online-only digital card game, not to be confused with the physical *World of Warcraft* Collectible Card Game. *Hearthstone* is a game in which you spend money to buy extra digital 'cards' in order to play a better hand. It's strategic, intelligent and fun, and from a storytelling perspective, introduces unique characters whose personal journeys are described in the cards themselves (and on the artwork).

With a wealth of games to draw on, as well as spin-off novels and comic books, *Warcraft* as a world is here to stay. Here's looking forward to how it all translates onto the screen.

*WARCRAFT: THE BEGINNING* opens in the UK on June 3rd, and in the US on June 10th.



Warcraft: The Beginning



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by Fred McNamara

# Mark Netter

**This month, we talk to writer/producer/director MARK NETTER about his first feature, NIGHTMARE CODE, a bold sci-fi/horror thriller, which impressed when it was released in 2014.**



**STARBURST:** Why did you want to make *Nightmare Code*?

Mark Netter: *Nightmare Code* started with a lunch between myself and our lead executive producer, Craig Allen, who had an independent video game studio, Spark Unlimited, with some extra cash for a project like this. We brainstormed the idea of sentient computer code, containing the personality of the programmer, and being very, very angry, and the idea of shooting in their offices over seven weekends with surveillance cameras, PC cam, and eyeglass cameras (worn by the actors), on an ultra-low budget. Everything flowed from there, and as I've been dying to make a feature film since before I went to the New York University Graduate Film School several decades ago, I grabbed onto the opportunity, got my co-writer M. J. Rotondi aboard, and never let go.

We loved the idea of starting a conversation about technology - how it's not only moved beyond our control, but has turned around and started controlling us. All different ways to make our seemingly small movie look and feel a lot bigger.

**The use of those surveillance, PC, and eyeglass cameras certainly seems to have paid off, but was it difficult to direct the movie using such a static form of filming?**

There were both challenges and benefits. We couldn't use camera movement or a large variety of angles to create emotion - it really had to be in the rhythms of the performances and the editing. Some actors asked me when they'd have close-ups and I told the ones that had scenes in front of a PC that they'd have them then. A few actors didn't get any due to the logic of the story. It meant that they had to be very well-prepared with their lines, as I wanted to keep performances as intact as possible - for example, several of the video chat scenes have no edits at all. It also meant that we'd need full-body physical acting, like in a silent movie or stage play, and the beauty of the actor movement was key - like when Andrew J. West (Brett Desmond in the movie) is initially exploring his new office/home, or when Mei Melançon (as Nora Huntsman) is sneaking through the office trying to avoid detection in the last act.



The advantages were that we could shoot a lot of dialogue pages very quickly. For example, there's a big scene with Brett and Nora where they get emotionally intimate that was simply two surveillance cameras and two takes - one was four and a half minutes, the second was three and a half. We went for the shorter one! Some days we shot 12-15 pages, which is four or five times what you'd do on a Hollywood studio movie. At least.

But I think the best part was that the surveillance motif dictated our aesthetic. If gave us the voyeuristic, stripped-down experience, which made for great effects in the editing of the 'quads' - where, for more than half the movie, you see four images onscreen at once. This gave us "ROPER POV" named for the behaviour recognition software at the heart of the movie, and allowed us to let ROPER tell the story.

**Well, no-one can say you and your team weren't thorough! Speaking of challenges**

**and benefits, there's often a romanticism attached to indie filmmaking that it's a definite struggle, but the end result is well worth it. Would you say this was true for *Nightmare Code* as an entire production, beyond the manner in which it's filmed?**

While we're still waiting to see how we do on rentals and sales, and whether *Nightmare Code* enables us to make our next movie, there's a whole lot of benefits that have accrued for me personally thanks to the production - and, most importantly, the completion of the movie.

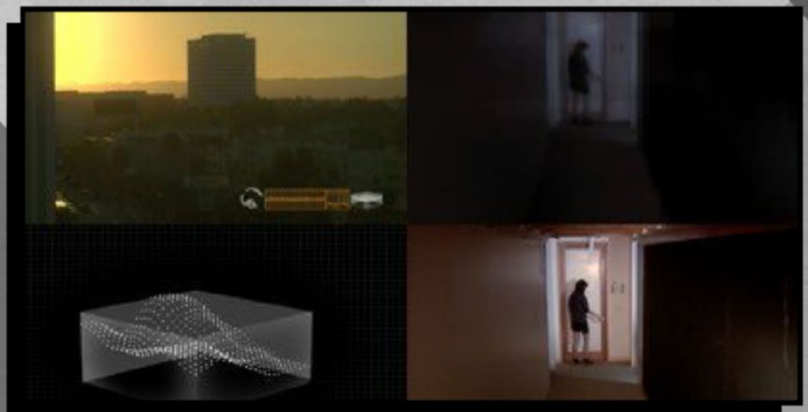
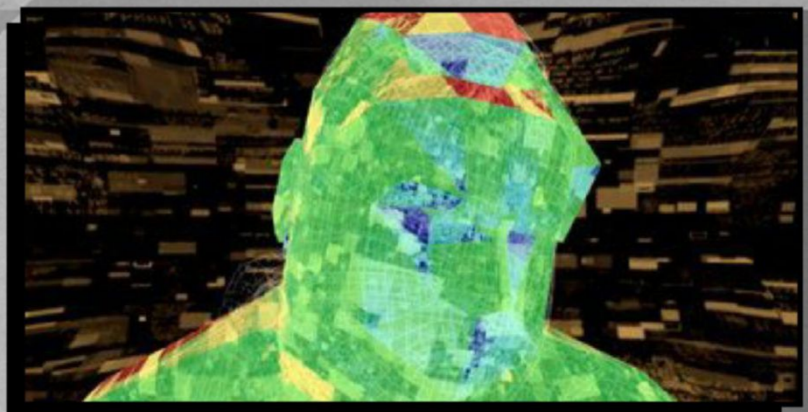
I have a ton of new relationships with actors, crew members, supporters and others that have made my life so much richer. I've also had the satisfaction of seeing a project that started three years ago actually complete into a viewing experience that's more-or-less what we originally intended, with little touches that we embedded throughout the film - in the writing, performances and visual effects - getting noticed by

various audience members. Finishing and releasing this movie has given me a renewed sense of hope and there are a lot of people telling me that it has inspired them as well, especially as I'm a bit older than your average first-time feature filmmaker! To top it off, we could not be happier with the general critical response - averaging 4/5 stars (or 8/10 as in the case of STARBURST and several others), which will hopefully help *Nightmare Code* reach the widest possible audience.

**You mentioned the premise of *Nightmare Code* features a sentient computer gaining the volatile personality of its programmer, and the horrific incidents that follow - was there a conscious decision to fuse the genres of science fiction and horror together, or did it begin life as a concept with just the one genre in mind?**

We wrote *Nightmare Code* as a horror movie - it's a very deliberate structure

## NIGHTMARE CODE





that could be used for a ghost story, where a creature from another world is trying to break into our human world, and as the protagonist gets stronger, the malevolent otherworldly force gets stronger as well, leading to explosions of violence. However, after we'd shot and cut the movie, we realised we had a psychological science fiction thriller - thanks to the subject matter and setting - with some horror overtones. We'd been looking at hybrid movies like *Alien* and *The Thing*, both of which, not incidentally, also take place in enclosed single settings, so I'm glad we ended up where we did.

I think that both horror and sci-fi, when properly executed, have the unique ability to blast open the doors of imagination. Horror tends to do it with a sledgehammer, making you lose your traditional sense of judgement in a blast of body-disfigurement, for example, while science fiction tends to use the scalpel. Utilised together, artfully, can

make for a very potent experience.

For science fiction to be dramatic it always needs some dose of fear or dread. Sci-fi tends to be about utopias that turn out to be dystopias, whether at a macro societal scale (*The Hunger Games*) or with a film like *Nightmare Code* in more allegorical way. ROPER is a utopian idea - why not capture and categorise human behaviour to prevent crimes and be more responsive to true user emotions? But since we have an innate fear of the new or unknown, a fear of progress replacing our tried and trusted ways, it's natural for sci-fi stories to exploit that fear for dramatic purposes.

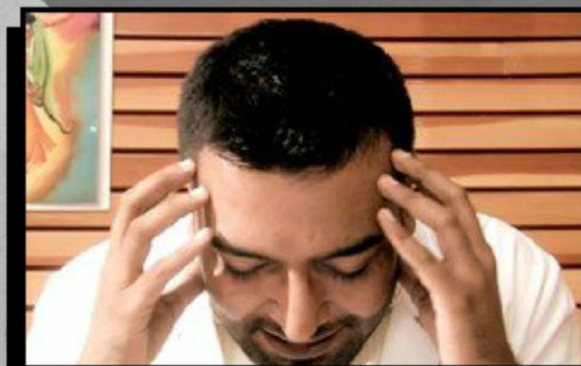
**That combination of styles certainly seems to have resulted in *Nightmare Code* being a favourite with other reviewers. Where does the film go from here?**

We are now available for VOD rental or purchase on eight digital platforms in North America, the U.K. and, I believe,

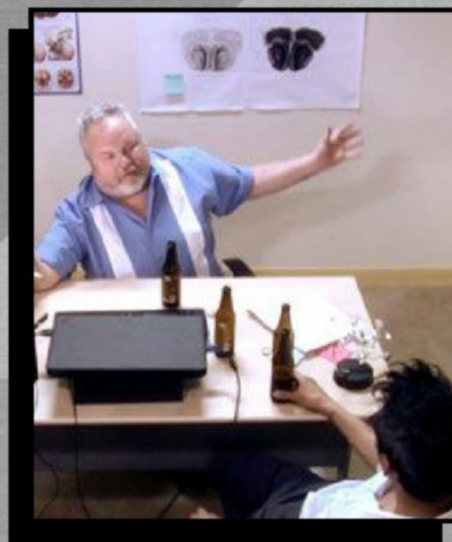
Australia. English-language DVDs are now shipping from Amazon, Barnes and Noble and Best Buy. We also have international distribution deals in the works (most likely digital, DVD, and television) along with, we hope, some U.S. cable television arrangements.

At this point, it's all about online press and audience word-of-mouth. Along with reviews like the fantastic one in STARBURST, we hope that regular users/viewers will tell their friends, write brief online reviews on IMDb, iTunes, Amazon, et al. Hopefully, people who have enjoyed discovering our movie - a kind of special feeling you get when you find a special film that doesn't have a big Hollywood marketing budget - will enjoy spreading the word as well!

**What with the online presence you've been securing recently, and all the screening plans you have prepared, what might you want audiences to take away from *Nightmare Code* when watching it?**







Great question. I hope audiences get a 'whole body' engagement when watching *Nightmare Code* - that the suspense is palpable, the violence truly shocking, and the visual style providing a very active viewing experience - and that afterwards they're left thinking about the very real issues raised by the movie, about their own relationship to technology, as well as a positive reaction to the terrific performances by Andy, Mei, Googy Gress (as Foster Cotton) and the rest of the cast.

I'm extremely proud of the work by the actors - even though we were an ultra-low budget production, they committed fully to the script and their performances, and gave us some of that indie feel you mentioned in your review. I think their performances ground the movie in very real, relatable emotions, and can't wait to work with all of them again sometime.

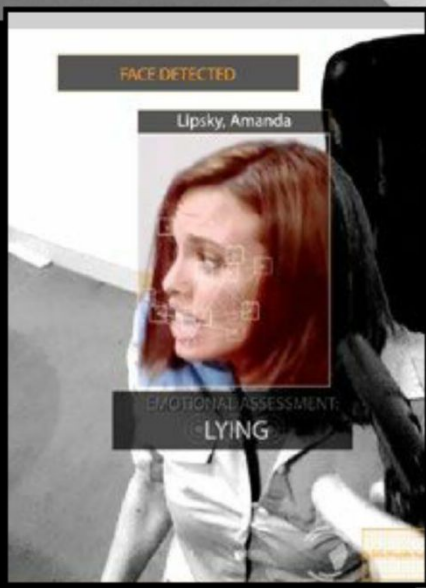
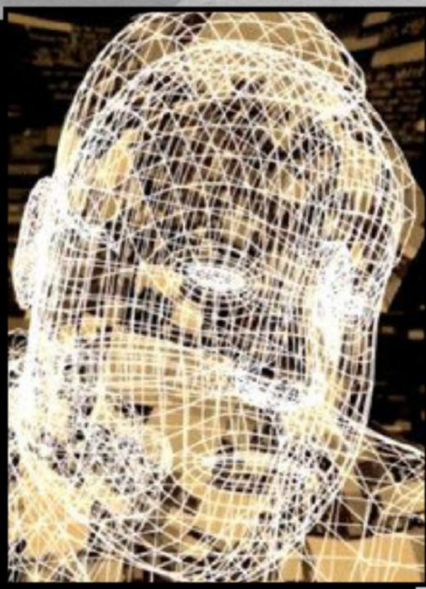
***Nightmare Code* looks to be keeping you busy for the foreseeable future then, but are there any other projects you're working on?**

My co-writer, M. J. Rotondi, and I have two projects in the works. One is a just-completed screenplay for another thriller, this one isn't sci-fi but a real noir, with four female leads in an army base town who enter into a blackmail conspiracy that rapidly spirals into kidnapping, murder, and betrayal. It's called *All The Way Down*, and we're just going out to find producing partners.

We're also in the early stages of a TV pilot script that would take off from the somewhat apocalyptic ending of *Nightmare Code* and see what happens after the events of the movie. Humans vs. ROPER in a long-form serial.

*NIGHTMARE CODE* is available on DVD and VOD in the US. A UK release is still to be announced.





## NIGHTMARE CODE

**CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR: MARK NETTER / SCREENPLAY: MARK NETTER, M.J. ROTONDI / STARRING: ANDREW J. WEST, MEI MELANÇON, GOOGY GRESS, IVAN SHAW, NICHOLAS GUEST / RELEASE DATE: TBC**

Mark Netter's directorial début is a merciless, calculated beast of found footage horror. *Nightmare Code* tells the story of a young, hopeful computer programmer, Brett, brought to complete a top-secret surveillance project left unfinished thanks to the mysterious death of its creator. However, the deeper he loses himself in the programme at hand, the more inescapable he finds himself, until the gut-wrenching truth behind the project becomes all too real.

Made up from found footage via security cameras and laptop recordings, *Nightmare Code* paints a masterfully varied canvas in the presentation of its story. Fusing scenes where the screen is made up of four security cameras at once with laptop camera calls, Netter drags the audience as close to the action as possible, giving the film a very personal flavour. The *Nightmare Code* itself centres on the effects of behavioural recognition through computers that keep a 24/7 surveillance. Bearing that in mind, one has to think if we're watching Brett tell his story or if it's the code's story.

The film's script is nothing out of the ordinary, but its familiar atmosphere of innocent individual turned inside out via a growingly intangible enemy complements the direction to great effect. Netter deftly crafts a superbly isolated environment within the 10th floor of a business hub where Brett and his colleagues attempt to piece together the surveillance programme. In the grand scheme of all things horror, this is nothing new, but Netter's crisp, brisk handling of the film and some fine performances from the main cast give *Nightmare Code* a deft yet throttling indie charm.

*Nightmare Code*'s indie background gives the film's horror tendencies some earthy ground, making them feel almost all the more genuine. The inevitable blood-splattering may not be entirely convincing, and in someone else's hands, the bare set pieces may feel unimaginative and hastily put together without much care. But here, the layout of the film works. The stripped-down surroundings collide with the claustrophobic nature of the film strikingly well, arming *Nightmare Code* with an endearingly simple, yet highly palpable force with which to smack the audience.

Ultimately, *Nightmare Code* is a snappy, thoroughly modern take on sci-fi horror. It has tension, effect, and some emotional hook in a minimalist yet stylish delivery. It may not go down in history as a turning point in the journey of horror cinema, but it's got more than enough enthusiasm to warrant a few kind words in any pocket-sized anthology on the subject.





# REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG  
SCREEN GENRE  
RELEASES REVIEWED  
AND RATED



## THE JUNGLE BOOK

CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: JON FAVREAU / SCREENPLAY: JUSTIN MARKS / STARRING: NEEL SETHI, BEN KINGSLEY, IDRIS ELBA, LUPITA NYONG'O, BILL MURRAY, GIANCARLO ESPOSITO, CHRISTOPHER WALKEN, SCARLETT JOHANSSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Yes, this remake of the 1967 animated classic does feature the song 'The Bare Necessities' but that doesn't mean that it's a slavish remake of the original, much as Disney's last live-action transfer, *Cinderella*, was. Neither is it a revisionist reimagining like *Maleficent*. Instead, it's clear from the '60s style Disney castle logo at the start, to the closing of the 3D tome at its end, that *The Jungle Book* is one of those rare beasts - a loving update to an enduring tale that actually works.

The story is mostly unchanged from the original (film, not book) with a few twists thrown in. Man-cub Mowgli (Sethi) is raised by wolves under the watchful eye of panther Bagheera (Kingsley) and lives a happy existence until the re-emergence of the tiger Shere Khan (Elba) forces him to seek safety in the nearby human village. Nothing, of course, is ever so simple and along his journey, Mowgli will cross paths with Kaa the snake (Johansson), Baloo the bear (Murray), and King Louie the orangutan (Walken), amongst others.

The film starts out a little shaky, literally, as the 3D in the first scene of Mowgli running through the jungle can be quite disorienting, but once the action calms down and the audience has time to get used to the slightly shiny CGI animals that surround the real-life Sethi, Favreau

manages to deliver a funny, touching, and exhilarating adventure.

Some of those CGI animals fare better than others. Kingsley's Bagheera is a perfect match for his voice, protective yet stern, as is Elba's Shere Khan at the other end of the scale, every word dripping with menace. Bill Murray's personality shines through in his rendition, even if his CGI bear doesn't quite convey the same amount of character as the older animated version.

Sethi does well in amongst all this CGI, avoiding becoming annoying and handling the darker, more emotional scenes well.

Johansson's Kaa is, for some reason, freakin' huge, but her role is little more than a cameo. Walken's King Louie is similarly massive, dwarfing all other characters, but his part, and personality, are more than match for his stature. Walken also gets to revisit Louie's famous song and even though not all the original music makes it, the filmmakers find the time to squeeze some of them into the final credits.

A lot of the humour comes from smaller animals around the periphery, including the late Garry Shandling's Rain Man-esque Porcupine, a bevy of cute wolf cubs, and a honey-basted pig (not like that!) that help keep proceedings light.

Like Kaa and Louie, elements of the plot, including the climax and the relationships between some of the characters, have also been 'amped-up', but these changes keep the story fresh for those with fond memories of the original and will surely help a new generation to treasure these characters as well.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED  4

ACTUAL  8







## HARDCORE HENRY

**CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: ILYA NAISHULLER / STARRING: SHARLTO COPLEY, DANILA KOZLOVSKY, HALEY BENNETT, TIM ROTH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

'You're like a rabbit in the headlights', Sharlto Copley says staring directly into the camera (at YOU!) in *Hardcore Henry*. If you ever got motion sickness from all the shaky-cam action in found footage horror movies, you'll probably want to give this film as wide a berth as humanly possible. There may not be an annoying character running and screaming and waving a camera around like their life depends on it, but *Hardcore Henry* is all shot from the first-person perspective of its half-human, half-machine lead character.

The titular Henry awakes in a flying laboratory after losing two limbs and most of his face in some unseen grisly accident. His scientist wife, Estelle (Bennett), is putting him back together with new robotic parts when suddenly telekinetic villain Akan (Kozlovsky) bursts in, kidnaps Henry's beloved and sends his henchmen to hunt and kill poor Henry. But they've underestimated this half-cyborg super-soldier and his determination to get his wife back, even if he's running low on power and hasn't got any memories of his former life.

Just because films based on video games never work, it doesn't mean that cinema can't have its very own version of a first-person shoot-'em-up. *Hardcore Henry* is so much like playing a video game that it feels strange not to have a controller in your hand. Copley pops up throughout the film as Jimmy to tell Henry/you what the next mission/level is that needs to be

completed. You might find yourself tilting your head, straining to see what Henry sees from a clearer angle, or recoiling from the screen as his enemies leap, punch, kick, and shoot at him. There's even time for a sniper's eye view as you stand on a balcony picking off enemies below you.

Being this restricted to one character's point of view comes with its ups and downs (literally). Unsurprisingly, it's incredibly immersive, particularly in the middle of Henry's seemingly endless fight scenes, and when he runs, jumps, and drops from buildings to show off his parkour skills. But there are occasions where the action is too chaotic and a different perspective on events would be more than welcome. But where would the fun be in that? Especially when you get to see all the brutal stabbings, shootings, and decapitations right up close and personal from Henry's point of view.

Like a video game, the action is relentless. It's like Jason Statham's *Crank* on speed... if that's possible. If you've seen director Ilya Naishuller's music video for Biting Elbows' *Bad Motherfucker*, then you'll know if you're going to get a kick out of *Hardcore Henry* or not. Impressively, Naishuller manages to sustain this balls-out pace and level of technical ingenuity for over an hour and a half with a hero that never speaks, a whole load of repetition in terms of structure, and just that one restrictive viewpoint.

While it barely pauses from its

non-stop violence, a slight detour into a brothel will bring back memories of *The Prodigy's* first-person music video for *Smack My Bitch Up* as *Hardcore Henry* takes the idea of the male gaze to all new extremes. Naishuller has a tendency to overuse music, to the point where the film starts to feel like a series of action-packed music promos, and you wonder instead if Henry is just constantly wearing headphones blasting non-stop techno in your battered earholes. The film also doesn't score any points for its constant disdain for female characters, either, which could easily be remedied by a future sequel - *Hardcore Henrietta* anyone?

Despite Sharlto Copley giving his all as Henry's pal Jimmy (who, like a video game character, has multiple lives), and even delivering a wickedly funny musical number, the stars are the stunt performers. Naishuller throws everything at the screen (literally) as he puts his GoPro-wearing stunt team through the wringer. It might give some a hardcore headache, but *Hardcore Henry* is an ultra-violent blast of fresh air; a breathless first-person superhero movie with a body count bigger than director Naishuller's ambition.

PETE TURNER

EXPECTED ++++++ 9

ACTUAL ++++++ 8





## BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: ZACK SNYDER / SCREENPLAY: CHRIS TERRIO, DAVID S. GOYER / STARRING: BEN AFFLECK, HENRY CAVILL, GAL GADOT, JESSE EISENBERG, AMY ADAMS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After decades of anticipation, we've finally got the big screen battle between the Dark Knight and the Man of Steel or, as Jesse Eisenberg's Lex Luthor dubs them, Son of Krypton against Bat of Gotham. This is the one we've all been clamouring for: this is Batman v Superman. The big question on everybody's lips now, though, is just whether or not Zack Snyder's Man of Steel follow-up is actually worth the hype.

Plot-wise, the film starts by using Ben Affleck's Bruce Wayne as our 'in' to the tale, looking at Bruce watching the carnage of Man of Steel's finale play out as thousands of innocents are put in jeopardy whilst Superman battles General Zod. From there, Master Bruce has just one aim: to stop the alien menace that has the power to literally destroy the planet. To the ever-grizzled Batman, this apparent super man is nothing more than another person who needs to be accountable for their actions. And this is a mantra that many others actually share when it comes to the Last Son of Krypton. But not everybody; for there are those on the opposite side of the fence who see Superman as a God, as the saviour and protector of mankind, as the bright shining beacon of hope in a world so often full of doom, destruction and death. Now, whilst Bats is firmly on his crusade to bring down the Kryptonian, Superman himself is forced into a corner that means he simply needs to collect the Dark Knight's head. So the battle lines are drawn, with the likes of Eisenberg's Lex, Gal Gadot's Diana Prince, Amy

Adams' Lois Lane and Jeremy Irons' Alfred Pennyworth all watching from the sidelines as the greatest ever gladiatorial bout gets set to take place.

This particular writer was actually one of those going into Batman v Superman with a renewed sense of hope. Sure, on paper, the film sounded like a mess that was merely waiting to explode in the WB's faces - a case of let's shoehorn in whatever we can so that we can say we've got a cinematic roster of heroes to rival Marvel Studios' line-up - but if they could pull it off, and that was a big if, then we would finally be given an all-out battle for big screen supremacy between the two greatest rosters of comic book characters known to man (sorry, Xavier's mutants). And that's what we wanted to see. Ultimately and sadly, Zack Snyder's hotly anticipated Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice does very little to actually satiate the cinematic appetite of DC fans, leaving a hollow feeling of regret and dissatisfaction at large parts of what you've just watched play out.

In fairness, Snyder's Man of Steel follow-up does have some shining moments, but they are too few and far between in an effort that is overflowing with illogicalities; gaping plot holes and moments that simply don't make sense in any fundamental way that relates to the characters that we're seeing being fleshed out on the big screen, particularly when it pertains to Superman. Yet again, the Big Blue Boy Scout is cinematically shafted. There are times, especially in his quieter moments

with Diane Lane's returning Martha Kent, where the hope, honesty and innocent idealism of the Last Son of Krypton are crafted beautifully, but so much of the film falls flat when placed on the Man of Steel's shoulders. Added to the feeling of dissatisfaction is a quite frankly ridiculous decision as to why Batman and Superman stop fighting - and no, there's a lot more to it than just the spoiled-in-the-trailers arrival of Doomsday, the beast responsible for slaying Kal-El in the comic book realm. The way that the finale plays out will likely leave a lingering bad taste in the mouth of many long-time Superman fans as one of the key components of Superman and his abilities is betrayed before your very eyes. Similarly, Eisenberg's take on Lex Luthor is something else that could well be a turn-off for longstanding comic book aficionados. Snyder and Eisenberg must be commended for trying something new and different with Lex, but his frenetic, almost OCD-lite Luthor feels short-changed and soon feels like an afterthought and a misjudged attempt to do something unique with Supes' greatest nemesis.

On the major plus side, Affleck's Batman is a welcome big screen debut for this new take on the Dark Knight. But it's with the Bruce Wayne side of the character - the side that you always fancied Affleck to be able to nail - that the Argo actor stuns. His Bruce, who has been around the block and been patrolling the grim streets of Gotham City for many a year by this point in time, is as intense as they come as he never takes his eyes off the prize or loses focus of the job at hand, which is to protect Gotham and beyond at all costs. Affleck's Wayne has a brooding intensity to him that would do Michael Keaton proud, and it could well be argued that it's the film's time with Bruce Wayne that's even more impressive and compelling than the time spent with the Batman himself, especially the film's opening ten minutes, which sets the tone perfectly for what should've been a truly epic movie. Sure, it's epic in size and scale, and there are plenty of heroes and villains at play - Gal Gadot's Diana savagely sparkles when she finally gets to bring her sword, shield, and famed lasso out to play - but the quality of the storytelling, again largely when it pertains to Superman, ultimately sees the film become a let-down.

Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice is a massively flawed movie that could well be another huge nail in the DCCU coffin where many moviegoers are concerned. The film itself will likely end up doing huge business, but sadly for us, there are just too many problems that unravel as Snyder's Dawn of Justice stumbles to an unsatisfying close.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED ★★★★★★ ★★★ 7

ACTUAL ★★★★★ ★★★ 5





## 10 CLOVERFIELD LANE

**CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: DAN TRACHTENBERG / SCREENPLAY: JOSH CAMPBELL, MATTHEW STUECKEN, DAMIEN CHAZELLE / STARRING: JOHN GOODMAN, MARY ELIZABETH WINSTEAD, JOHN GALLAGHER JR. / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

So is 10 Cloverfield Lane, which dropped as suddenly and unexpectedly – or at least with as little fanfare – a sequel to Matt Reeves' J. J. Abrams-backed blockbuster 2008 found footage monster movie Cloverfield or not? The clue's in the title, of course; perhaps it's Abrams himself, on board here as producer through his prolific Bad Robot Productions brand, who summed it up best when he described this new movie as the 'spiritual successor' to the earlier hit. It's best to go into this one with no real preconceptions, but certainly, if you're expecting a film just like the original Cloverfield you might be inclined towards disappointment at first... but not for long.

10 Cloverfield Lane is an intense, claustrophobic gut-punch of a movie. Mary Elizabeth Winstead plays Michelle, who, in the film's urgent opening sequence, desperately flees New Orleans to escape from her fiancé Ben (voiced by Bradley Cooper) for reasons unexplained. In the dead of the night, her car plunges off the road and she awakes to find herself a prisoner in a concrete-walled cell, attached to a drip and fed and watered by the ursine Walter (Goodman) who tells her that "there's been an attack" and that the outside world has been all but obliterated. Michelle is understandably dubious – Walter's clearly a survivalist nutjob – and she soon finds that she's not alone in Walter's admittedly well-stocked hideaway. She meets Emmet (Gallagher Jr.) who apparently witnessed the attack and fled to the bunker. It soon becomes evident that something has happened outside and the trio settle into an uneasy

existence underground, prepared to sit out the two years or so it might take for conditions above ground to sustain human life. But when the bunker's air filtration system breaks down, only Michelle can fix it, and in doing so she makes a deadly and dangerous discovery, which changes everything for the survivors...

10 Cloverfield Lane grips like a vice from the outset and doesn't let go for its hundred-odd minute runtime. The film is restless and uneasy, punctuated by a sense that something just isn't right here, that the whole story isn't being told. Edgy and discomfiting, we're never allowed to sit back and relax; we're waiting for the next trauma, the next moment of explosive confrontation. Winstead is brilliant as the resourceful, desperate Michelle, but Goodman is quite astonishing as gruff man-mountain Walter; the relationship that develops between the pair crackles with tension and barely-disguised threat. The film's slow burn eventually erupts into fire and violence and, without drifting too far into spoiler territory, it's fair to suggest that fans of Cloverfield frustrated by the intimate human drama of the first hour or so of 10 Cloverfield Lane are likely to feel a bit more at home with the extraordinary turn of events which send the last reel hurtling off into an entirely different, but no less exhilarating, direction.

But that's not to suggest that anyone, fan of the original or not, is likely to be seriously disappointed or frustrated by 10 Cloverfield Lane. This is a gripping, unnerving drama (developed, incidentally, from a spec script originally entirely

unconnected to Cloverfield) which manages, in the end, to stay in the 'world' of the first film without slavishly aping its style or even its scenario. The film marries its sensational performances to an irresistible and uncomfortable story to deliver an intimate, almost low-key experience, which is sure to live longer in the memory than many of the brasher, flashier blockbusters that lie in wait for audiences across the rest of the year. A wonderful and welcome surprise, a visit to 10 Cloverfield Lane is highly recommended.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++ 9





# REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME  
VIDEO RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



## MR. ROBOT: SEASON 1

DVD + BD + VOD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTORS: VARIOUS / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: RAMI MALEK, CHRISTIAN SLATER, CARLY CHAIKIN, PORTIA DOUBLEDAY, MARTIN WALLSTRÖM / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Profound and mesmerising, Mr. Robot is a deep examination of how the new technological age affects our current modern society, either accelerating it for the better or darkening it for the worse. It's also an intense and psychologically detailed human drama, and what series creator Sam Esmail has done perfectly is create a drama that, darkly and disturbingly, show how much humanity has evolved in a superficial way, which is definitely (and perhaps morbidly) current. It also cleverly tackles real weighty themes of isolation, obsession, addiction, dysfunction, abuse of power and greed, and all without being exploitative or too on the nose.

Ambition and power is at the centre of the technological world, and as each and every facet of our mundane human lives is continuously consumed by information, that saturation and breach of privacy gets controlled and manipulated by people with amplified efficiency, and that is definitely the case in this series. There is no clear black

or white with any of these characters, there's only a morally grey area. We have the group of hackers known as "fsociety", who are always operating in the dark and on the outside, the world's conglomerate puppet masters in E-Corp, and the working middle-men caught in the crossfire. At the centre is Elliot Alderson, a troubled young man who ends up becoming the key player in setting in motion and orchestrating the fate of the world's digital and social age.

In terms of how it tackles character development and details, story arcs and its stark representation of the modern world, this show succeeds with flying colours by proving to be immensely thoughtful and thought-provoking. The show is swimming in a sea of darkness, with no light touches to be found. It's super serious, but what's astounding is that it never becomes dreary or dull as a result of that. Unapologetically, every aspect of the series is as sharp as a knife; it's edgy and gritty, yet also immensely enjoyable, intelligently

written, expertly directed, and powerfully raw. While the ultimate twist is easily predictable from a mile away and can fizzle out for some, there are plenty of other surprises to fall back on, plus strong performances.

Having first impressed in the excellent *Until Dawn* video game last year, Rami Malek is a mesmerising screen presence as the unassuming lead protagonist. From the personal ramblings, to the internal monologues, to the emotional breakdowns, Malek nails every single emotion and nuance of Elliot's character, and gives a career-best performance. As the titular character, Christian Slater is superb, bringing such unique dynamic energy to the part that it's almost impossible to take your eyes off him. The rest of the supporting cast are all excellent as well, particularly Carly Chaikin, Portia Doubleday, Martin Wallström and Stephanie Corneliussen, with each one bringing something new and exciting to the mix.

Another aspect of the show that excels is its production design and direction. Its attention to detail is spotless and is something the show takes full advantage of, as each and every area or location has meaning or a purpose within the narrative. The direction is very unusual, yet also visually striking. The way certain characters like Elliot are framed often makes them look small against a big, sweeping and consuming world. The cinematography by Tim Ives is masterful and makes the shots are all edited together beautifully. The soundtrack is nothing short of genius and Mac Quayle's music is very reminiscent of the haunting scores of Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross (*Gone Girl* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*).

As it stands, Mr. Robot is easily the best, and smartest, new show to hit TV in the past few years, being atmospheric, thought-provoking, honest, and believable. It perfectly blends cold technology with raw humanity, which makes it all the more unique. It's wonderfully constructed, the performances are universally terrific, and the writing's intelligent, which makes the story consistently exciting. It's a mature, darkly engrossing piece of genre fiction that further demonstrates why television is a writer's medium.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 9





### THE WONDER YEARS: THE COMPLETE SERIES - DELUXE EDITION

DVD / CERT: PG / DIRECTORS: VARIOUS / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS /  
STARRING: FRED SAVAGE, DAN LAURIA, OLIVIA D'ABO, ALLEY MILLS,  
JASON HERVEY / RELEASE DATE: MAY 9TH

If you're of a certain age, The Wonder Years needs no introduction. For six seasons, between 1988 and 1993, it was one of the most successful shows on US TV, charting the adventures of twelve-year-old Kevin Arnold (Fred Savage) as he, and his friends Paul Pfeiffer (Josh Saviano) and Winnie Cooper (Danica McKellar), negotiated the often very funny but sometimes bittersweet turmoil of adolescence while, in a wider view, Kevin's family tried to hold things together in the disorder of late 1960s America.

It was essentially a sitcom,

but it quietly redefined what a sitcom could be (if you can call a show that had the guts to debut on Super Bowl night 'quiet'). Its humour comes from the heart, from the memories the show evokes about our own growing-up, to the wish fulfilment that we all wanted to have friends like Kevin, Paul, and Winnie (and Olivia d'Abo, even more gorgeous than her Bond girl cousin) who would stand beside us through good times and bad. But there was plenty of drama too - in fact, in one of the best pilot episodes that has ever been made for

any series anywhere, the comedy of Kevin's first day stepping through the portals of manhood at Robert F. Kennedy Junior High is offset by the news, at the end of the episode, that Winnie's brother has been killed in the Vietnam War. It is a genuine moment of shock that not only ends with Kevin and Winnie's first tentative kiss, setting up an on-again off-again relationship, that would last right through until the series finale, but bravely sets out the stall for the 114 remarkable episodes that were to come.

And there isn't a bad story among the bunch, and they're all here inside this mammoth 26-DVD box set together with more exclusive bonus material than even the most enthusiastic Wonder Years fan could ever wish for. It's during one of these special features, when the cast reunites to share their stories about the show, that you get a real clue to the magic of The Wonder Years - working on the series was obviously an intense experience for everyone, and there's a genuine sense of a family reunion as they sit together and reminisce. And, in a particularly fascinating interview, the show's creators Neal Marlens and Carol Black give a terrific insight into not only the evolution of the series but what came afterwards,

when they decided to quit Hollywood to lead a real life. Even better though, all the original sixties and seventies music that was featured in the show when it first aired has been restored, including Joe Cocker's all-important cover of 'With a Little Help From My Friends'.

It sounds hokey, but revisiting this series is like catching up with a long-lost best friend and learning more about them than you ever thought possible! This is a phenomenal set, a terrific keepsake of one of the best television series ever made, and it's truly - erm - Wonder Years-ful to finally have every episode available to relive over and over again.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★★ 10



### IP MAN 3

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: WILSON YIP / SCREENPLAY: EDMOND WONG, CHAN TAI-LEE, JILL YEUNG / STARRING: DONNIE YEN, ZHANG JIN, MIKE TYSON, LYNN HUNG / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 25TH

Making a bid to take over the city and properties therein, brutal gangsters set their sights on a local martial arts school, determined to have the place as their own - at any cost. Resident genius at kicking and punching, Master Ip (Donnie Yen) takes umbrage to this, putting all of his talents to good use in tackling the hoodlums head on. This is done mostly by

kicking or punching them in the head, and sometimes by using a very long pole.

Wilson Yip's latest is the third in a series based on the life and adventures of the real-life martial arts master (to Bruce Lee, no less - distractingly featured, all chin and huff). Neophytes shouldn't worry though, as Ip Man 3 is thoroughly accessible

to newbies - so much so, in fact, to occasionally be to its detriment. The predictable, overdone story is but a backdrop to Donnie Yen coolly beating the paste out of hordes of sharply dressed idiot gangsters, with precision and brutality. "I dabble", Ip Man humbly shrugs, when questioned on his martial arts prowess early in the film. Contrast this with everything that follows, as the man barely breaks a sweat throughout.

Unlike Mike Tyson, a man so uncomfortable in front of a camera that he singlehandedly drags the film to a screeching halt whenever he appears. A stunningly awful actor in any language (you'll need the subtitles, even when he's speaking English), Mike Tyson's Frank is at least sparingly used, barely figuring into the action at all at first (or even at the end, ultimately). Thankfully, so long as he keeps his mouth shut, he cuts an imposing figure, flinging one stooge across the room with

but one punch. He's a ridiculous actor and a bad human being, but there's no denying that he gives Ip Man 3 a villain to remember. Outside of Donnie Yen and the incredible choreography, he's Ip Man 3's main draw. That battle between Ip and Frank is well worth the wait - there's a moment where Frank punches poor Ip so hard that he looks physically sick, and it's this attention to detail that makes each and every fight a thing of beauty.

A clichéd story (its tender and quietly heartbreaking romance aside) told well and with some truly breathtaking action, Ip Man 3 should please both aficionados of the franchise and newbies alike. Slick, fast, frantic and always impressive, it makes even the presence of Charisma Black Hole Tyson (don't tell him we said that) feel worthwhile. And really, he's not in it all that much.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★★★★ 8





## BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: SAGA OF A STAR WORLD

DVD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: RICHARD A. COLLA / SCREENPLAY: GLEN A. LARSON / STARRING: RICHARD HATCH, LORNE GREENE, DIRK BENEDICT, HERBERT JEFFERSON JR / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When we hear about Battlestar Galactica, the first thing that springs to mind is the widely acclaimed reimagined series that launched back in 2003, but before then, there was the original vision that all began with this. Originally intended as the opening 3-part pilot, the episodes were lumped together into a singular movie and distributed across cinemas with one big change being that the Cylons kill Baltar, whilst he is reprieved in the TV 3-part version to turn up in later episodes. Despite the big change, the rest of the story is intact and while it is mostly solid,

considering the time period in which it was made, it is definitely not a smooth ride.

In all honesty, it felt occasionally creaky and hokey. One aspect it fails at is its editing and pacing, going from incredibly slow and ponderous one minute to quick and adventurous the next, making the experience somewhat scattershot as a result. The effects tend to vary, with some looking amazing thanks to John Dykstra's wonderful model work, yet when the effects are bad, they are laughable. Also, during the space battle sequences, the film reuses way too many that it

just becomes distracting. Sure, you could've probably got away with it if you'd just reused it once and did some clever editing on it, but to reuse the exact same unedited shot four or five times is going a bit too far.

But, the main problem is that there is an inconsistency in tone, where the plot instantly turns from dark and disturbing one minute to knock-about comedy the next, and it is within the blink of an eye. In this story, there are intergalactic holocausts and humans turned into living hosts by bug-aliens, yet that contrasts heavily with the many comedic sequences with Starbuck (at least Katee Sackhoff's Starbuck wasn't like this) and the many annoyingly saccharine scenes, with the irritating Boxey (must be Anakin's long distant brother) and the robotic 'Daggit'. Oh, and that robot Daggit outfit is horrendous.

However, what makes the whole thing stand up strong is its core concept, as it tackles the themes of political debacles against an intergalactic war, and the robotic Cylons rebelling against humanity (which is something that became the driving force of Terminator with Skynet). The sequences of emotional distress, and the differences in political ideologies that surround the Cylon invasion, are impressively well handled and do a great job of adding more dramatic weight to the

overall story, which is helped by mostly strong performances throughout. It's perhaps thankful that in the revived series, creator Ronald D Moore wanted more focus on the politics of humanity's plight, and much less on the lighter comedic side of an intergalactic holocaust.

Even though the reimagined series is much stronger in comparison, the original Battlestar Galactica is still groundbreaking in many respects; despite all its faults, it brought a whole new level of production value that science fiction on TV had never previously seen before. The show's unusual concept and design work still stands as a testament to those who worked on it, even if some of the other aspects are less worthy of note.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★ 7



## THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE & HER LOVER

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: PETER GREENAWAY / STARRING: RICHARD BOHRINGER, MICHAEL GAMBON, HELEN MIRREN, TIM ROTH, ALAN HOWARD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A film as lavish with its cinematography as it is with its depiction of faeces, violence, and nudity, *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* has lost none of its quiet shock value. The film is a stately depiction of the grotesque consequences of overwrought power, constant greed and forbidden lust.

The Cook, the Thief, His

Wife & Her Lover follows the evolving affair between a quiet bookshop owner, Michael, and a gangster's wife, Georgina, who frequent a high-class restaurant that's been captured by Michael Gambon's superbly volatile mafia boss Albert. Michael and Georgina's affair is doomed from the very beginning, but don't take that

as a spoiler, folks. This is a film devoted to its own twisted, artificial nature.

The real star here isn't Helen Mirren's sultry yet innocent Georgina, it's not Alan Howard's gentle Michael, and it isn't even Gambon's larger-than-life embodiment of underworld excess – it's the restaurant much of the film takes place in. Director Peter Greenaway invites us into this grand establishment, a home that encompasses villainous rogues feasting like pigs and a sensual affair that spirals from room to room, a labyrinth of hidden locations tucked away deep in the restaurant's belly. *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*'s intoxicating visuals belittle its limited location, but that location is omnipotent in its ability to convey this film's strange, strangled take on dark humour.

By comparison, the plot is a mundane matter; as Georgina and Michael's affair is inevitably exposed, both Georgina and Albert realise that the only

course of action is for heads to roll – that's about it. However, as you may have guessed, *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* finds substance in how its destructive romance is intertwined with the engrossing set pieces.

More than 25 years since its release, *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* has lost little of its power. Its ability to shock is blended with a detached, unbothered sense of grace and elegance, as if the film is confident enough in its majestic atmosphere to deliver some animalistic savagery. With that grasp on its power remaining as strong as ever, it does of course mean that *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* is as much an acquired taste as it was all those years ago. However, it's a taste that certainly lingers on the tongue for quite some time.

FRED MCNAMARA

★★★★★★★ 8





### THE BORROWERS (1997)

DVD / CERT: U / DIRECTOR: PETER HEWITT / SCREENPLAY: GAVIN SCOTT, JOHN KAMPS / STARRING: JOHN GOODMAN, JIM BROADBENT, MARK WILLIAMS, CELIA IMRIE / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 18TH

Surprisingly, Peter Hewitt's 1997 film was the first big-screen adaptation of Mary Norton's 1952 children's novel; arriving not long after the BBC series, the Working Title production ditches much beyond the basic premise, instead devising a new story around the tiny Clock family and their "borrowing" habits and giving Arrietty a younger brother into the bargain.

The plot itself is rather slight,

revolving around the plight of the Lender family, whose house is due to be demolished after their aunt dies, apparently without leaving a will. In fact, her lawyer Ocius P. Potter (a broadly odious John Goodman, enjoying himself immensely) is keeping the will a secret so he can demolish the house and build Potter Towers in its place, and when the Lender's young son Pete discovers the Borrowers' existence, he and the

Clock children join forces to save their home.

And that's about it.

Children's movies tend to be less about plot and more about the confluence of activity and story, and on these counts The Borrowers scores very highly. Hewitt's cameras are rarely still, gently panning and tracking through the slower scenes and delivering the punctuating incident with clarity and not a little panache. Jim Broadbent and Celia Imrie are perfectly cast as the Clock parents Pod and Homily, while Mark Williams puts in an appearance as the local pest exterminator and Gregory House himself turns up as a considerate if rather clueless policeman.

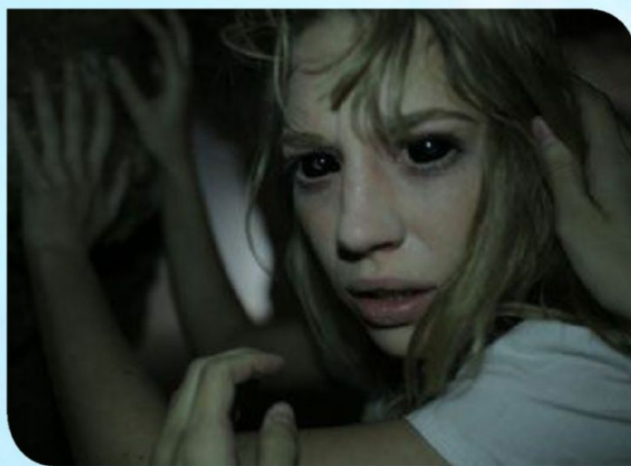
The effects, of which there are necessarily plenty, have generally aged rather well, there being only a couple of instances where they are overly obvious, and in fact the film itself has aged much better in its two decades than might have been expected, due to Hewitt's decision to give the entire project a very 1950s aesthetic, in spite of the use of mobile phones and suchlike.

The whole film has been shot through an orange filter, which combines with the green visual cues to create an ambience of nostalgia that sets the existence of the Borrowers in a familiar yet entirely fictional universe, one that suits them nicely. The use of a largely American cast as the human "Beans", and even the alternative 4:3 presentation of the film – perhaps a hangover of its arrival shortly before the DVD-inspired 16:9 revolution – are further affectations that help to perpetuate the illusion of timelessness.

The younger cast, quite obviously placed as identification characters for watching children, all acquit themselves impeccably, making this a fast-moving and attractive proposition for junior viewers and adults alike, all acquit plenty to amuse in the plot. While Norton aficionados might find the liberties taken with the text somewhat off-putting, for anyone else this is a delightful and inclusive confection.

JR SOUTHALL

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



### JERUZALEM

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTORS & SCREENPLAY: DORON PAZ, YOAV PAZ / STARRING: Yael Grobglas, Danielle Jadelyn, Yon Tumarkin / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Some young people are celebrating, recording everything they do, and things are going really well, when suddenly all hell breaks loose and, with the help of the military, they try to escape lots of small monsters and one really big one you see in passing now and then, only to end up in dark underground passages where they aren't alone. One of the young girls has been bitten and is starting to change...

Yes, Cloverfield really was great, wasn't it? But this description is for Jeruzalem, a shameless rip off/homage of several movies, of which Cloverfield and World War Z are the most imitated.

Here, a couple of young American girls are heading to Israel for a backpacking holiday, as one recovers from the death of her brother. They befriend a fellow traveller, an anthropologist

with an interest in the occult and religion, and together they stay in a hostel in Jerusalem. But the holiday becomes a nightmare of biblical proportions when a gateway to hell is opened and the gated city goes into lockdown as winged demons appear and a bloody big thing, that's impossible to make out, strolls around in the distance. Trapped, their only way out is to venture underground, where a series of caves and tunnels could lead them beyond the city walls. Oh, and one of the girls is wearing a nifty pair of smart glasses, and we see the entire film through them.

As you can imagine, the film does have a certain sense of déjà vu about it. Holidaying Americans in trouble? Check. Weird locals offering a strong sense of foreboding? All present and correct. Authority figures unable to help when the chaos reigns down? You betcha. Yes, we've seen it all before. But on the plus side, writer/directors the Yaz Brothers, spend their time building things up, so we do get a genuine sense of the city, and it's nice to see an apocalyptic invasion film set somewhere other than LA for a change. Once the carnage starts, there are some quite atmospheric

sequences and the demons themselves, all wide of mouth, tortured of soul and ragged of wing, are pretty creepy and provide a couple of good jumps.

On the minus side, towards the end there's too much running about, so the action becomes a little repetitive. Some of the acting is a bit hokey too, and the main character, Sarah, who wears the snazzy glasses, starts to grate with her endless whining.

But the glasses are the key to what makes the film stand slightly above some of the worst examples of the 'found footage' subgenre of horror. As you're seeing through the eyes of the main character, you're also getting other snippets of info as she does, like maps popping up, to show where you are, photos being taken as she snaps her holiday, Skype calls with her dad, old photos and, importantly, facial recognition, something that brings about a nice little twist towards the end.

So whilst it's hardly going to top any lists, is it worth 90 minutes if you're a fan of horror good or bad? Hell, yes!

ROBERT MARTIN

★★★★★★★★★★ 6





## THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY PART 2

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: FRANCIS LAWRENCE / SCREENPLAY: PETER CRAIG, DANNY STRONG / STARRING: JENNIFER LAWRENCE, JOSH HUTCHERSON, LIAM HEMSWORTH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As seems to be de rigueur with book to screen adaptations nowadays, *Mockingjay* - the final part of The Hunger Games series - has been stretched out to one film more than necessary. The upside of this means that, whereas *Mockingjay* Part 1 consisted mainly of Jennifer Lawrence et al hiding in a bunker for two hours, Part 2 is the one where stuff actually happens.

When we left things, Katniss Everdeen (Lawrence) had become an unwitting figurehead in the rebellion against President Snow (a magnificently hammy Donald Sutherland), the deeply

unpleasant leader of Panem - that's post-apocalyptic North America to the uninitiated. She's being used as a mere propaganda tool; however, the face of a rebellion, masterminded by less nasty President Coin (Julianne Moore) and Philip Seymour Hoffman's Plutarch Heavensbee - easily the winner of most bizarre character name in a franchise full of them.

Having previously united the various districts of Panem, the rebels march on the capital in order to overthrow President Snow. In keeping with her role, Katniss' team is ordered to stay

behind the front lines and shoot propaganda footage. In a neat twist on the series' origins, as they progress through the city, they face a series of lethal traps set by the Gamemakers - the designers of the Hunger Games - with the resultant deaths televised. Instead of the deadly reality show of the first couple of films, this time around, war itself has become reality TV.

What sets The Hunger Games apart from other YA franchises such as *Divergent*, *The Maze Runner*, and *Twilight* is that it touches on bigger ideas. The blurring of the line between entertainment and cruelty has been a central theme of the series, as has the role of propaganda in warfare, with the rebels attempting to turn things into a Katniss-centric reality show. It's come a long way from its 'Battle Royale, but for kids' roots.

Equally important, at least to certain sections of the audience, there's also the ongoing love triangle to be resolved. Will Katniss end up with super-hunky Gale (Hemsworth) or Peeta (Hutcherson), a man whose special skills include baking, painting himself to look like a tree (seriously) and crying a lot? Oh, and when we last saw Peeta, he'd been brainwashed to kill Katniss, just in case it was a difficult

choice. It may not be as exciting as the blowy-up fighty bits, but it's a story that's been well told throughout the four films, and is satisfactorily resolved here.

As the moody, sometimes unlikeable Katniss, Jennifer Lawrence is typically excellent. Over the course of the series, she's grown into one of Hollywood's biggest, most exciting stars, and for good reason. She's ably supported by stalwarts such as Sutherland, Julianne Moore and the late Philip Seymour Hoffman (who died during filming). Some other cast members, however, feel a bit short changed. Jena Malone - one of the standouts of *Catching Fire* - is wasted, as are the likes of Stanley Tucci and Elizabeth Banks. Likewise, series newcomer Gwendoline Christie has a single scene, getting even less screen time here than she did in *Star Wars*.

As with the novels, the finale of The Hunger Games series is not quite up to the standard of the first two entries. However, it's a distinct improvement on the protracted Part 1, and a great end to what's by far the best of the current crop of YA series.

IAIN ROBERTSON

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



## THE PACK

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: NICK ROBERTSON / SCREENPLAY: EVAN RANDALL GREEN / STARRING: ANNA LISE PHILLIPS, KATIE MOORE, KIERAN THOMAS MCNAMARA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Somewhere in the Australian outback, a family are about to be evicted from their property. The bank offers a deal but the farmer and his wife won't go, despite the fact that something unknown and nasty is lurking in the woods and slaughtering their sheep on a regular basis. Their teenage daughter is itching to get back to the city, but their young son loves it here. He has even constructed something like a human-sized

rat run, a tunnel made from wooden slats and boxes, where he hides his treasures. Among the treasures are two rifle bullets. Who's betting that they might come in handy as the story continues?

Luckily for the family - but unluckily for the banker - after the pompous moneyman leaves their house, he stops to relieve himself in the woods. That's not a smart idea. The Pack - a gang of

murderous wild dogs - promptly take him down and rip out his throat. And then they turn their attentions on the family inside the house. The family erect barricades, but when the dogs find their way into the building, the family's chances for survival look less than hopeful.

The Pack is a strange film. It takes the familiar 'nature gone bad' trope that seems to be such a favourite of Aussie cinema (Long Weekend, Razorback, The Last Wave) and throws in elements of Stephen King's *Cujo* and Hitchcock's *The Birds* to create a family-in-peril thriller that is very good to look at but, ultimately, isn't very thrilling. It's the screenplay that lets everything down - from the clumsy foreshadowing of the bullets-in-the-rat-run at the start of the film, to the illogical behaviour of the Pack themselves: they kill the banker and a police officer en masse but, whenever they go after the family, they helpfully decide to attack one at a time, thereby giving our heroes the optimum chance to escape (or, on at least one occasion, they don't even

attack at all). They also seem to have lost their sense of smell, which is fortunate because it means the farmer's wife can hide behind a door with one of the dogs standing two feet in front of her without catching her scent. It's moments like those that make The Pack such a frustrating experience.

Still, all the performances are good, the direction is tight and the film is very well paced. The dog attacks are also extremely well done, even if the inevitable 'no animals were harmed during the making of this motion picture' proviso neuters the violence a fair amount.

Don't go into The Pack expecting too much, and you might be nicely surprised. And if you're a sheep, you should probably watch this with your eyes closed. But if you're really in the mood for some humans-versus-mad dogs action, Robert Clouse's similarly themed 1977 film - which also shares the same title - is much better.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★★ 8





### **BANDE À PART (1964)**

**BD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JEAN-LUC GODARD / STARRING: ANNA KARINA, SAMI FREY, CLAUDE BRASSEUR, ERNEST MENZER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Bande À Part is one of Jean-Luc Godard's most beloved films, and for a very good reason. It is absolutely timeless and incredibly charming.

To say too much about the story would be to spoil all the fun, but here's a synopsis: Odile (Anna Karina) lives with her aunt in a suburb of Paris. When she meets Franz (Sami Frey) she tells him about the horde of money that is hidden inside the lodger's room at her aunt's villa. Together,

Odile, Franz and Franz's best friend Arthur (Claude Brasseur) plot to steal the money, but both the young men have fallen for Odile and are competing for her affections while - to make matters even more complicated - Arthur's crooked uncle (Ernest Menzer) finds out what they are planning and demands a piece of the action, which forces the three hapless gangsters to stage their heist sooner than planned. Things do not go well. There are

double-crosses, bullets are fired, Odile, Franz and Arthur make a joyful impromptu attempt on the 'sprinting through the Louvre' world record, and there's a very cool, extremely iconic dance sequence, which many other directors have tried to reproduce but none have bettered (although Quentin Tarantino came closest, when he unleashed John Travolta and Uma Thurman on the dance floor in *Pulp Fiction*... yes, without *Bande À Part* that scene would never have happened). There's also a wonderfully dry narration, supplied by Godard himself, which performs a pretty clever sleight-of-hand - while keeping us outside of the action and reminding us we are watching a film, it also, at the same time, places us deeper inside the character's heads and makes the film a more immersive experience. Put simply, *Bande À Part* is a revolutionary blend of heist thriller, hipster romance and surrealist fairytale that, together with Godard's earlier film (also a crime story) *À Bout De Souffle* (1960) defined the French New Wave and stylishly turned the

conventions of European filmmaking inside-out. It is one of world cinema's greatest masterpieces and if you haven't seen it yet, you really are in for a treat.

You won't be surprised to hear that the BFI's new Blu-ray looks and sounds superb. Raoul Coutard's cinematography is breathtaking, and Godard's gritty grimy interpretation of '60s Paris really jumps off the screen. There is also a treasure trove of wonderful special features including a full-length audio commentary, a terrific 2016 interview with Anna Karina, a delightful silent film starring Karina, Godard and Sami Frey, and a whole handful of fascinating extras, including an especially interesting chat with Claude Chabrol, who, like Godard, was a film critic-turned-filmmaker whose work was instrumental in shaping nouvelle vague cinema.

C'est Magnifique!

IAN WHITE

+++++10



### **CHILDREN OF MEN**

**DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: ALFONSO CUARÓN / SCREENPLAY: ALFONSO CUARÓN, TIMOTHY J. SEXTON, DAVID ARATA, MARK FERGUS, HAWK OSTBY / STARRING: CLIVE OWEN, JULIANNE MOORE, MICHAEL CAINE, CLARE-HOPE ASHTEY, CHIWETEL EJIOFOR / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

It is 2027 and women have mysteriously become infertile. The world is on the brink of collapse except for Britain, which is still holding itself together. Former activist Theo (Clive Owen) is contacted by his ex-wife (Julianne Moore), who is the leader of a political rebellion group called The Fishes. She asks him to help transport a girl named Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey) to a boat, as she is miraculously the first woman to get pregnant in 18 years.

Alfonso Cuarón is probably best known for *Harry Potter* and the *Prisoner of Azkaban*, regarded to be the point in the

series where it started to get good, and for the supremely entertaining and exciting *Gravity*, for which he won an Oscar, but it is *Children of Men* that is his true masterpiece. A political action thriller, the film is thought-provoking, intelligent, entertaining, exciting and disturbing, and is unique in a genre that needs more diversity and thought.

An adaptation of the P.D. James novel of the same name, *Children of Men* starts with a big 'what if?' and runs with it. The setting is a slightly futuristic but disturbingly plausible one, as the world has started tearing itself apart under the pressure

of worldwide infertility and the impending end of mankind, with only Britain still barely holding it together. As usual fear has manifested into hate, and the government has a zero tolerance policy towards illegal immigrants and refugees, detaining them and deporting or killing them. This creates distressing but plausible images of refugees held in cages by armed guards and attack dogs, and immigrant camps the size of small towns; a society where refugees and immigrants aren't even treated like second-class citizens, but like animals. This situation has also created violent political groups, fighting against the vicious government regime. With the current refugee crisis and political climate all over the world, *Children of Men* is still a hugely pertinent and relevant film.

The camera in *Children of Men*, overseen by Oscar-winning Cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki, moves around with the characters, placing you firmly in the action, the camera very rarely moving above head height. It gives the film an almost documentary style, as it moves with the characters, occasionally turning away to focus on something else, which builds a bigger picture of the world, whether it be a

mother crying while she holds the dead body of her child in her arms or an immigrant pleading from inside a cage. These are images that are shown on news programmes almost nightly and the film puts you right there in the thick of it, confronting you with them. The camera always retains its focus and purpose, there is no motion sickness-inducing shaky-cam here, creating exciting and kinetic sequences. If you have seen *Gravity* then you will not be a stranger to Cuarón's use of long takes, and *Children of Men* features several stand out shots. An attack on the party as they travel, shot entirely within the confines of a car, and an extended sequence shot inside a prison camp that is being torn apart due to gun fighting, are astonishing and exhilarating sequences that stick in the mind long after.

*Children of Men* is a very underrated and brilliant film. A political action thriller that both excites and makes you think, it is the filmmakers working at the top of their talent. If you haven't seen it, rectify that immediately.

COURTNEY BUTTON

+++++10





## WAKING LIFE (2001)

DUAL / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: RICHARD LINKLATER / STARRING: WILEY WIGGINS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Hatched from the ever-expansive and creative mind of Richard Linklater, *Waking Life* is a pseudo-docudrama about a guy who is seemingly stuck within dream-state realities. As the film goes on, we go on this spiritual journey with him as he interacts with various individuals. With each interaction, many philosophical ideologies emerge, with the film delving deep into the concepts of the nature of reality, the meaning of life, existentialism, post-humanity, consciousness, dreams, and the notion of free will. Animated through

rotoscoping, this is undeniably a truly unique viewing experience that will intrigue some, but might leave others frustrated.

Linklater tackles the ideas of the true nature of our existence and the way lucid dreams affect our perception of reality, as well as many other topics, but what makes the film striking by itself is its unique and flawless animation. Almost like a precursor to the similarly rotoscoped animated film that Linklater would do later, the superb *A Scanner Darkly*, the animation in this film captures

the unique and surreal vision Linklater set out to create, and through this rotoscoped portrait of philosophy, the film succeeds greatly in creating a dreamlike viewing experience for the unsuspecting viewer. Every now and then, we all experience those kind of dreams where you've gone somewhere and done something that could've been great or terrible, and then when you wake up, you vaguely remember the specifics, yet the thought is always there at the back of your mind. The film creates that same emotion, which is perfectly reflected by the animation's fluid, water-like characteristics and jumpy attitude.

The notion of spending an entire film talking about the philosophical notions of life, the universe and everything is surely going to sound like a chore for some, but what Linklater does is try to present those same concepts as they are, but through a unique film style, rather than going all out and trying to reinvent those ideas and notions. This goes to show how much of a versatile genius Linklater is as a filmmaker, after tackling many genres with comedies (*School of Rock* and *Bernie*) and dramas

(*Boyhood* and the *Before* trilogy), but with every project he does, he tries something that is unique and different from the film he has done before. This could be seen as a semi-companion piece with *Slacker*, which dealt with people interacting and discussing philosophical topics, yet this stands out as its own entity.

That's not to say the film is accessible to all audiences because, in truth, it isn't, as some people will probably just get bored or frustrated by it and deride it as nothing but naval-gazing balderdash. However, *Waking Life* is one of the most unusual and most thought-provoking films you'll ever see, visually striking and superbly acted all round. With each and every person we encounter on the protagonist's spiritual journey, it's like we are eavesdropping on a meaningful conversation that holds real weight on emotion, highlighting the concept of the intertwining of one's dream life with their "waking life" and how those can collide with other people's as well. Memories become dreams and vice versa.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



## KRAMPUS

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MICHAEL DOUGHERTY / SCREENPLAY: TODD CASEY, MICHAEL DOUGHERTY, ZACH SHIELDS / STARRING: ADAM SCOTT, TONI COLLETTE, DAVID KOECHNER, ALLISON TOLMAN, CONCHATA FERRELL, EMJAY ANTHONY / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 25TH

The problem with making films with a seasonal setting is that the draw to watch them tends to be fixed for that particular time of year. It's a particular issue if the movie in question is based at Christmas. So, watching Michael Dougherty's anti-Santa flick with spring just around the corner (although the weather doesn't seem to agree) is a little challenging. It's a good job, then, that *Krampus*, like the writer/director's earlier *Trick 'r Treat*, is just the right side of fun to keep the interest.

It's Christmas Eve, and terror lurks in the Engel household. Something so terrible it sends shivers down the spine of all involved. It's the annual visit from the relatives. Mom Sarah (Collette) has married into a decent life with Tom (Scott), living with their kids and the paternal grandmother (Krista Stadler). The visiting clan are a bunch that almost make the Griswalds appear appealing. Howard and Linda (the ever-watchable Koechner and

Tolman respectively) have their obnoxious children in tow, as well as Aunt Dorothy (Ferrell); they all want to be there as much as they are welcome, but traditions must be followed.

When Max (Anthony) is teased for his letter to Santa, he retreats to his bedroom upset. Tossing the ripped paper into the air appears to set in motion a Christmas they won't forget - but one all too familiar to Grandma Engel. One by one, the family will come under attack or be taken by a series of nightmarish creatures - ranging from vicious gingerbread men to psychotic elves and murderous Jack-in-the-box clowns. The worst is yet to come as *Krampus* himself is to pay a visit for those who haven't necessarily been good all year.

Although the sum of the parts may well seem hackneyed and predictable, the likeable cast (and especially the insufferable characters) make the action enjoyable. While it's not as scary as it should be, there are enough horror and thrills to keep the less demanding fan pleased. The

family dynamic is the draw here, with our sympathies and loyalty purely with young Max, while he tries to weather the storm that hits his home - and that's even before the titular anti-Claus makes his presence felt.

It's a shame that the seasonal theme ties it too much to one time of year. While *Trick 'r Treat* was entertaining enough to spin at almost any time, whether you'll want to dig out this frosty fear flick in the middle of summer is another thing.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

★★★★★★★★★★ 7







## CHERRY TREE

**DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: DAVID KEATING / SCREENPLAY: BRENDAN MCCARTHY / STARRING: NAOMI BATTRICK, PATRICK GIBSON, SAM HAZELDINE / RELEASE DATE: MAY 2ND**

Unless your movie is literally *The Witches* or *The Wizard of Oz*, the wicked witch is a hard horror villain to get right. *Conjuring* (heh) up images of

hook-nosed crones with bright green *Shrek* make-up and a boil, you're so doomed from the start that most of the time it's best not to even bother.

They're perhaps the ultimate horror hard sell.

That hasn't stopped director David Keating from trying, though, his modern witch tale telling the story of a young girl who turns to a local coven in the hope of saving her dad's life. A deal is struck, though it comes with a catch. And quite the catch it is. A baby is required, leaving Faith knocked up as her dad begins his miraculous cancer recovery. What follows is like *The Witches* crossed with *Juno*, with a little bit of *Society*-esque body horror thrown in for good measure.

That's quite the mishmash of styles and ideas, and, regrettably, Keating doesn't always pull it off. Where the first half is slow and dull, the second

is silly and dull, its cherry metaphors far too on-the-nose and obvious, just like the not-at-all subtle use of the colour red and suggestions that Faith might want to have sex with her dad a little bit. Had it been directed by a bona fide auteur with practice and vision, *Cherry Tree* might have stood a chance of pulling this off. Instead, however, it feels relatively cheap and small, too much like the director's previous *Wake Wood*.

There's some strong imagery to be found here and a decent cast (the centipedes steal the show) but where this cherry should pop, it merely fizzles out.

JOEL HARLEY



## EUREKA (1983)

**BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: NICOLAS ROEG / STARRING: GENE HACKMAN, RUTGET HAUSER, MICKEY ROURKE, JOE PESCI, THERESA RUSSELL / SCREENPLAY: PAUL MAYERSBERG / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

'Once I had it all. Now, I just have everything.'

Pity the man who seeks his fortune in gold, only to find that life lived as a rich man makes you suspect that everyone else is gold digging for themselves...

Loosely based on a true story, Nicolas Roeg's seventh feature tells of the fortunes both personal and financial of Klondike prospector Gene Hackman. Here is a man determined never to rely on another man's sweat to find his way in life, and years spent trying to find gold in the snowy Canadian mountains finally pays off when he slips into a cave following a mystical near death experience.

Inside the cave, a beautifully realised piece of production design by Michael Seymour

(*Alien*), the liquid gold flows, almost drowning Hackman in wealth. At one point, he emerges from beneath a golden pool in a reflection of the classic shot of Donald Sutherland lifting his dead daughter from the water in Roeg's *Don't Look Now*, only here the man is full of hope for a dreamed of future not made real.

And as he emerges from this pool, he glances around suspiciously, looking out for anyone who might claim the gold he now considers his own. This is how the rest of his life will unfold.

Years later, and the richest man in the world wants for nothing in material wealth on his island in the Bermudas, whilst his wife drinks to relieve the tedium and his daughter (Roeg's own wife

Theresa Russell) marries a man Hackman is convinced is after his fortune, brilliantly played by Rutger Hauer from *Blade Runner*.

As greedy investors move in, seeking to develop on his land, and against a backdrop of war and voodoo occultism, Hackman's heightened paranoia finds him isolated and looking back at a life that should have given him everything. His paranoia, though, is not unfounded.

When it was released in 1983, *Eureka* didn't get many gold stars from the critics, and it certainly doesn't achieve the grand status of the likes of Roeg's best works, *Walkabout*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, or *Don't Look Now*. However, there's much to enjoy here if you're familiar with the director, his signature style in full evidence - cross-cutting between time periods, juxtaposing images that are seemingly

unconnected, handheld shots amidst formality and stunningly beautiful photography.

Whilst the always-brilliant Hackman is on screen, it grips like a tight gold chain, and the supporting cast is great too, including early performances by Mickey Rourke and Joe Pesci. But, and here comes a big spoiler, following one of the most grisly and disturbing murder scenes you'll ever see, the last half hour suffers from his absence and there's a feeling that the film could have and should have ended at that point, the continuing story of Russell and Hauer being of less dramatic interest.

If you're a fan of Roeg's work, there's a lot to gain from *Eureka*, but it's probably not the best of his work to catch if you've only ever seen *The Witches*, as good as that is.

ROBERT MARTIN





# AUDIOSTATIC

THE LATEST NEWS  
FROM THE WORLD OF  
AUDIO ADVENTURES  
BY TONY JONES



## Do You Remember Vinyl?

In this world of streaming and digital, vinyl refuses to lie down and die, and we've recently had a few announcements of audio drama coming to vinyl.

Demon Records is bringing out **Genesis of the Daleks** in 180g TARDIS blue, originally released on audio in 1978. Not to be outdone, Big Finish is offering two collector's releases on vinyl – **Spare Parts** and **Chimes of Midnight**. These are both out of print on CD, and it will be fascinating to discover how well they do.

## 42

Fans of Douglas Adams, and moreover **The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy**, might want to visit <http://youandwho.weebly.com/you-and-42.html> and contribute to a crowd-sourced collection of essays edited by Jessica Burke and Anthony Burdge. The deadline is quite soon: June 5th, 2016, so don't dawdle.

## Big Finish

In other news from Big Finish, the fifth series of **The Confessions of Dorian Gray**, released in October, will be the last outing for the immortal Dorian as played by Alexander Vlahos. We also learnt that June will give us a special fiftieth anniversary release for the **Dark Shadows**, range with a two-disc special, **Blood and Fire** written by Roy Gill.

## 1984

First up, a walk through history. It's sometimes easy to forget the role science fiction played in mass entertainment in the days before television. Americans had Orson Welles' **War of the Worlds** marking a mythical moment in broadcasting, but in the UK we had plenty to cherish. From back in 1949, no less, and available

on the [openculture.com](http://openculture.com) website is a recording of the first ever broadcast of George Orwell's **1984**, starring David Niven.

## The Pick of the BBC

There have been a few pieces tucked away in the BBC schedule recently, and worth finding on iPlayer Radio if you didn't hear them when they went out. Firstly, we were treated to a three-part series, **The Magus**, on Radio 4. Adapted from John Fowler's novel by Adrian Hodges, this is the first ever radio version. The cast included Tom Burke (**War and Peace**), Charles Dance (**Game of Thrones**) and Hayley Atwell (**Agent Carter**).

Back to Radio 4 Extra and a version of E. M. Forster's **The Machine Stops** was repeated. First broadcast in 2001, it stars Gemma Jones, John McAndrew, and Jillie Meers.

## BIG FINISH WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

### JAGO & LIFEFOOT SERIES ELEVEN

The popular Victorian gentlemen return for another four adventures set in the **Doctor Who** Universe. Christopher Benjamin and Trevor Baxter reprise their roles as usual, and are joined this time by Jonathan Forbes and former Hammer actor Edward de Souza as Bram Stoker and Sir Henry Irving, respectively, in a spooky tale written by Matthew Sweet. Colin Baker also makes an appearance as the Sixth Doctor.

AVAILABLE APRIL 30th

+++

### TERRAHAWKS: VOLUME TWO

The classic Gerry Anderson TV series continues its fun audio adventures with this second collection of tales. There are eight stories here over four discs, as well as a bonus CD, which takes listeners behind the scenes with interviews with the cast and crew. All the episodes are directed by Gerry's son Jamie, who also contributes to the writing team.

AVAILABLE APRIL 30th

+++

### DOCTOR WHO: THE NOVEL ADAPTATIONS 09 NIGHTSHADE

The Doctor (Sylvester McCoy) and Ace (Sophie Aldred) become embroiled in the mystery of why so many people are falling fatally foul of their memories. A faded actor's past glory might hold the key to helping the pair save the day. Based on the novel by Mark Gatiss.

AVAILABLE APRIL 30th

+++

### BLAKE'S 7: THE LIBERATOR CHRONICLES VOLUME TWELVE

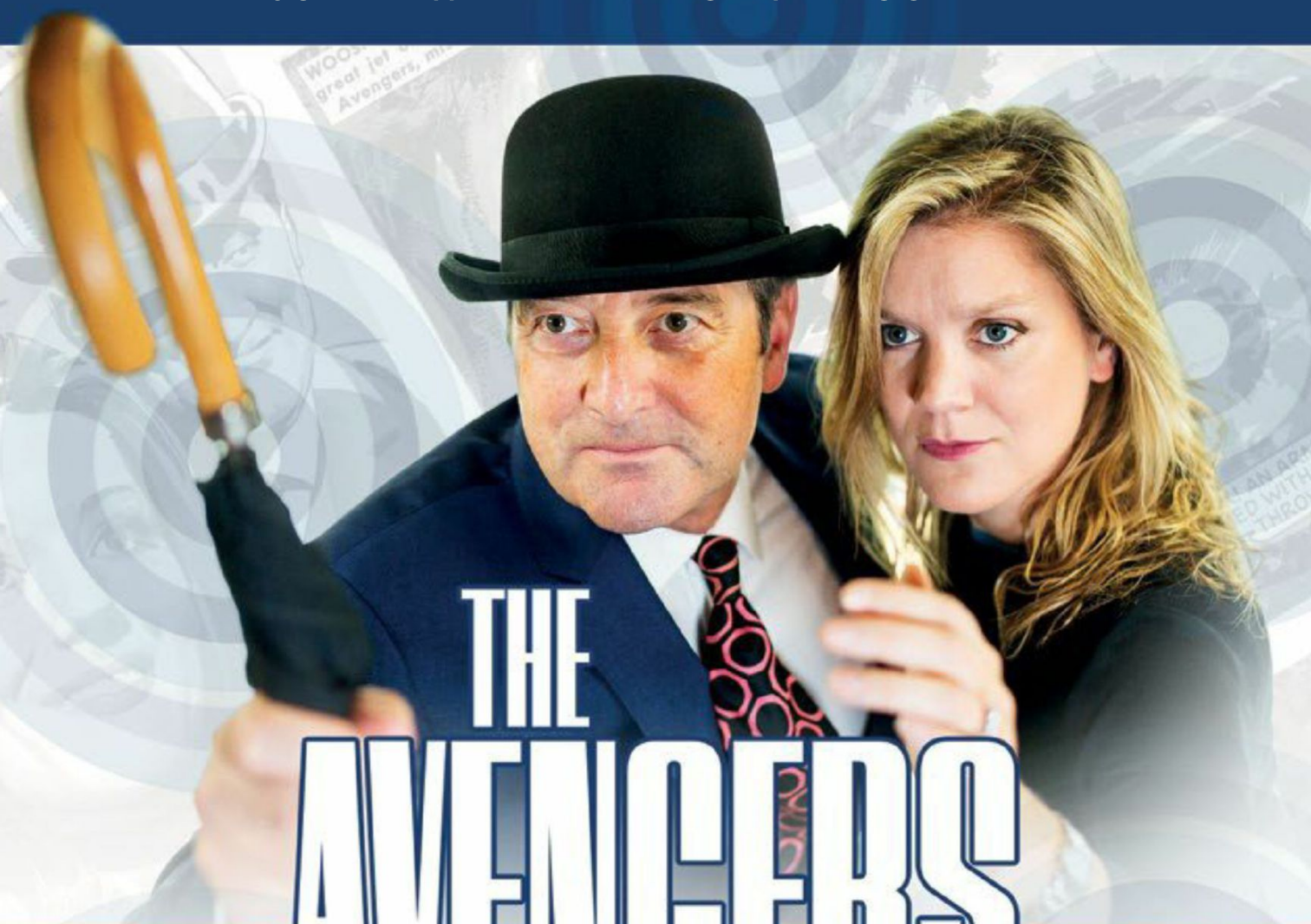
The ongoing adventures of the crew of the legendary ship continue with three more exciting tales, as Avon (Paul Darrow) and co. get into more thrilling scrapes on their travels through the galaxy.

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# REVIEWS

THE LATEST AUDIO  
RELEASES REVIEWED  
AND RATED



## THE BARN

COMPOSER: ROCKY GRAY / LABEL: LUNARIS  
RECORDS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In his liner notes to Rocky Gray's score, writer and director Justin Seaman says that *The Barn* was the movie he'd dreamt of making when he was eight years old: "The Monster Squad meets *Night of the Demons* meets *Night of the Creeps*." The movie's not yet had a general release, so we can't judge as to whether or not *The Barn* meets those lofty goals, but Gray's score certainly evokes every aspect of

that '80s horror triptych.

However, it's the haunted house vibes of the main titles that set this score apart from the start. You get the sense that Gray is going for something different, wherein he's trying to show that Seaman's film isn't just another '80s homage: it's an '80s homage that recognises all aspects of the genre. The violins on "Hallowed Jack" counterpoint a synthy vibe, making the idea of "classic" stretch back to include classic creature features.

There's plenty of synth, enough to evoke the classic feel of that era, with the likes of the funkily eldritch "Lovecraftian," but, really, that's expected from a throwback score these days. Gray does it well, but it's something that is basically *de rigueur* at this point. It's not anything especially different, although it must be mentioned that *The Barn*'s score does Carpenter worship properly, remembering that there were quiet moments in those old Halloween cues, effectively presenting the less overt - but nonetheless still unsettling - version of that aspect in "I Don't Believe".

The metal guitars tie everything together. *Night of the Demons* and *The Monster Squad* were, really, hard rock

movies as much as they were horror films. Screaming solos, to which you can air guitar, really let you hear the fact that Gray has an affinity for all aspects of the time and place to which Seaman is giving tribute. One's inclined to wish there were more guitars, but it works because it's used so sparingly. Too much would spoil the fun. Ending with a great bit of hard rock balladry works wonders, though.

The cover art is amazing, the vinyl release sounds great, and the liner notes fold open like a set of barn doors. A lot of thought went into this, and it's just a fabulous release to hold in your hands, even if it's sans the usual bells and whistles of tip-on sleeves and so on. It was honestly more refreshing to get a download card than anything else.

Ultimately, though, this is worth seeking out in any format. While the retro horror boom might occasionally be seen as losing steam, the likes of Gray's score for *The Barn* give hope that fresh sounds can be birthed from old concepts.

NICK SPACEK

★★★★★★★ 7



## LAST HOUSE ON DEAD END STREET (1977)

COMPOSER: VARIOUS ARTISTS / LABEL: VOMBIS  
RECORDS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Everything about the Vombis Records release of *Last House on Dead End Street* combines to create an absolutely terrifying package. All of the art is taken

from frames of a rare 35mm print of the infamous grindhouse shocker, and they're blown out just enough to make you feel like you're looking at something forbidden.

The track listing inside is in the familiar library music format - apt, as this soundtrack is a collection of library pieces, which took clever fans of the 1977 film years to search out and identify. The descriptions are succinct, but perfectly convey the taut nature of these recordings, with the word "throbbing" making repeated appearances, along with equally accurate summations as "insistent", "tense" and "nebulous", amongst others.

The collection of sounds found on *Last House on Dead End Street*'s two sides are certainly less a score in the sense of 'music', than a score in the sense that this is a series of sounds, which set the mood and tone for the music. It's more akin to the work of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop or the *Forbidden Planet* score than anything else out there, and is far more appropriate for creating a sense of unease and foreboding than for outright pleasure.

There are the occasional musical pieces: "Beat Me 'Til I'm Blue" is

absolutely shocking in terms of its upbeat funkiness. Also, coming as it does in the midst of all these brooding tones, the bass only serves to further discomfort the listener, as it's almost so low that it's experienced and felt, rather than heard. However, it's absolutely the exception that proves the rule for these pieces.

*Last House on Dead End Street* is an album that we can only suggest listening to in separate sessions. Take a break between the two sides. You'll need it to come down and steel your nerves for the second side's assortment of sounds in ever-increasing volume, which makes the first's quiet insistence seem like child's play.

The pure simplicity of this release allows the compilation of "electronically produced cues" to really shine, even divorced from the film's visuals. With *Last House on Dead End Street*, Vombis Records has put out something that stands at the apex of audio sleuthing and sinister audio mechanics.

NICK SPACEK

★★★★★★★ 9





## STRANGENESS IN SPACE: EPISODES 1-3

**PRODUCER: CLARE EDEN / AUTHOR: TREVOR NEAL, SIMON HICKSON / STARRING: TREVOR NEAL, SIMON HICKSON, SOPHIE ALDRED, CAROL CLEVELAND, BARNABY EDWARDS, PETER GUINNESS, RUFUS HOUND, DOON MACKICHAN, ALEXIE SAYLE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW (FREE DOWNLOAD)**

Strangeness in Space sees '90s children's TV comedy duo Trevor Neal and Simon Hickson join forces with former Doctor Who assistant Sophie Aldred, in a series of unexpected and surreal adventures aboard a deep-space vessel, in orbit around Planet Mirth.

As well as recently showing their mettle as trivia experts on BBC quiz show Pointless, Trevor and Simon are proven talents as authors of daft sketches, and it's a skill that's used to great effect here. But the immediately impressive thing about this new online comedy sci-fi serial is not its content or concept, but the way that it has been brought into being. This is a completely autonomous and entirely crowd-funded series, with the

small production team recording, mixing and releasing each new episode as the funding target is met. Fans and supporters agreeing to back Strangeness in Space can select from an inventive range of affordable merchandise or enjoy treats such as having their name read out in the programme credits. It is such a brilliantly twenty-first century way of generating the monies necessary to fund a creative sci-fi project, you can't help but wonder why more people aren't doing exactly the same.

The plots of the early episodes are playful and frequently absurd. Listeners won't find much agonised existential reflection on the nature of human existence, but they will enjoy lots of well-crafted gags, ridiculous word play and improbable moments of 'mild peril'. As a result, it's not really the destination of the plot that matters, so much as the fun of the journey in getting there. The first episode features a shoe-storm (a cue for lots of terrible footwear puns), while episode two is all about an unsettling outbreak of hiccups and flatulence amongst the ship's crew. You get the general idea...

One of the joys of Strangeness in Space is the very postmodern way that it breaks the norms of the audio drama format; characters complain to the narrator, argue about the logic of the storyline, and continually break through the artificial constraints of the 'sound barrier' between performer and listener. But it's a sort of postmodernism that will be used to set up a string of preposterous name puns, or jokes at the writers' expense, and not one that tries to come over all BBC-Four-clever with an exploration of 'meta-narratives'.

Everything about the show tells you that cast and crew are simply having a blast. Sophie Aldred is excellent in the role

of a bewildered NASA Space Centre gift shop manager, while Trevor and Simon (here playing self-obsessed members of '80s pop-synth band Pink Custard) deliver their signature squabbling shtick to hugely entertaining effect, only this time in outer space. Along with producer Clare Eden, the main cast are alumni of Manchester university drama studies, and they are joined by some impressive names, including Rufus Hound, Alexie Sayle (as a tightly-wound museum attendant) and genre stalwart Barnaby Edwards (who delivers a great turn as the robot-computer Lemon). It was recently announced that Paterson Joseph (Peep Show, Survivors) would join the cast for episode four, when the funding target is reached. This is a quality project: the production values and sound design bear comparison with any fully commercial audio output, and the programme's web site is a first rate piece of design too.

There is warmth to Trevor and Simon's writing and performances, and the quiet 'madness of their method' delivers comedy that is always silly but never sickly sweet. This latest project of theirs offers a universe of possibilities for random nonsense and weird happenings that can frustrate the good intentions of the series' heroes. The producers of Strangeness in Space have launched a funding bid for the £5k needed to fund the recording of episode four, Pet Shock Boys – you see what they did there? The first three episodes are available to stream and download for free from the series' site or through iTunes. Choosing not to check out some good, free, funny sci-fi? Now that would be strange.

**RICH CROSS**

★★★★★★★ 8



## TORCHWOOD: THE VICTORIAN AGE

**AUTHOR: AK BENEDICT / DIRECTOR: SCOTT HANDCOCK / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / STARRING: JOHN BARROWMAN, ROWENA COOPER, YOUSSEF KERKOUR, LOUISE JAMESON, AARON NEIL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Torchwood has always retained an odd relationship with history, or the idea that it is a centuries-old organisation. Often set exclusively in the present day, few stories truly stopped to look into past eras or what they had accomplished. However, The

Victorian Age shows just how much potential can be found in exploring past eras.

The British Empire's anti-alien defence organisation stands on a knife-edge. Queen Victoria herself is set to inspect Torchwood's headquarters and many know this could easily be a death knell for their efforts should anything go wrong. Naturally, a vicious alien chooses this exact moment to break loose into the streets of London. It's now up to Jack Harkness to halt it, with Queen Victoria in close pursuit.

The story embraces the full-on insanity and brimming energy of the television show, and as a result it's less Children of Earth than it is Something Borrowed. There's an inherent quirkiness to having Queen Victoria wielding a plasma gun and helping hunt down an alien in ye olde pub, and Benedict makes fantastic use of that. It's spun into brief moments of humour, which help give events an oddly light-hearted feel, while still easing itself into solid moments of drama when needed.

Given that there really are only two core characters here, the chemistry and performances of Rowena Cooper and John Barrowman help to seriously elevate this tale. While Barrowman slides back into the role of Harkness with little effort, it's notable that Cooper can stand out against him, with

all the loud and lively behaviour the story needs. The repartee between the two creates an engaging narrative, and it's obvious everyone involved was having immense fun playing out events. This allows the drama to overcome a lot of the usual bug hunt tropes and stand out well on its own.

Still, there are some frustrating moments that stem largely from The Victorian Age's extremely streamlined nature. A few critical elements are skimmed over, and are described rather than actually depicted, meaning the audience misses out on the action. This is only made all the more notable thanks to the script following the Matt Smith era approach of "damn the first act, get to the good stuff!" Very little time is taken to establish any story points before jumping right into the action, and it's easy to throw a listener off balance at first.

Still, the flaws here are ultimately minor ones and with great drama and humour alike, The Victorian Age gets a glowing recommendation. It's a great example of what Big Finish is capable of with this franchise, and a must buy for Torchwood fans.

**CALLUM SHEPARD**

★★★★★★★ 8



## OST

THE STARBURST  
GUIDE TO THE LATEST  
SOUNDTRACKS  
BY NICK SPACEK



If you've not picked up the score to **Baskin**, the Turkish horror film, as performed by Ulaş Pakkan, you're absolutely missing out. The film is an expanded, feature-length version of the popular short. The original short had a score by Volkan Akaalp, released by Giallo Disco in 2014, and was more of an industrial series of blasts. Pakkan's score for the feature occasionally delves into that area, but also flirts with Middle Eastern pop, synths as strings, and really works in a diverse array of styles. It's a fascinating listen, even for those who've not yet seen the film. It's available digitally from Lakeshore Records.

Waxwork Records head honcho Kevin Bergeron popped onto the Damn Fine Cast to update everyone about the label's releases and where some long-awaited scores are in the production process. The complete, remastered soundtrack to **Tales from the Darkside** by John Harrison is out now, with three variants available – *Lot 249 Mummy Spice*, *Cat From Hell* blue and black, and

*Lover's Vow* gargoyles green swirl vinyl, all housed in tip-on gatefold jackets, with liner notes by Harrison. That's not the really exciting news, though.

The **Warriors** will finally be available on May 6th. It's a double album, with both the score and soundtrack, in four different editions. There's a retail version on black vinyl, two variants of graffiti or subway car, as well as a deluxe version with the graffiti variant plus an extra slipcase and back patches – yes, like the gangs in the movie. The **My Bloody Valentine** double LP is at the pressing plant, and **Evil Dead 2** will likely be ready around Halloween. Before all that, in April, comes another release that Bergeron is keeping close to his chest, saying only that it's his favorite movie, is by a 'legendary' director with a score by an equally 'legendary' composer, and isn't a horror film.

Audio Fidelity is producing a red vinyl double LP issue of the **Armageddon** soundtrack – not the Trevor Rabin score, but the soundtrack album with all the

Aerosmith tracks, including the cloying hit, *I Don't Want to Miss a Thing*. I imagine this will sell tons of copies, despite the fact it's available on compact disc in bargain bins the world over.

Mondo pulled a huge left turn and released the Van Cleave score to the 1964 science fiction film, **Robinson Crusoe on Mars**. The rather classical, brass-heavy music has surprised a lot of fans, but given the recent releases by Mondo of **Jurassic World**, **Aliens**, and the like, this fits in – despite being for a rather lesser-known movie. It's some good stuff, if a bit outside what's currently hip, and comes pressed on 180-gram vinyl in either a limited edition of 1000 on translucent red and blue or readily available black vinyl.

Speaking of **Alien(s)** and the like, the label also let it be known that Marc Streitenfeld's score to the sorta/kinda **Alien** prequel **Prometheus** will be coming to vinyl soon, although details beyond that were rather slim.

Varèse Sarabande is back in the vinyl game, and one of their first releases is a multi-colour LP release of the classic **Star Wars** Trilogy LP, which has the Utah Symphony Orchestra performing the music from the original three films. It's long been held as the vanguard performance of John Williams' score, and it's nice to see it once again readily available on vinyl, especially in this lightsaber blue, red, and green striped version.

The label also announced via Twitter that they'll have Michael Giacchino's score for **Star Trek Beyond** this summer, in case you needed something else to which you could look forward.

A recent interview revealed a slew of upcoming releases from Ship to Shore Phonograph Company. In addition to the







already announced Joe Renzetti split LP with the soundtracks to **Basket Case 2** and **Frankenhooker**, remastered and resequenced from the original tapes, the label is going the whole hog with some video game scores. According to the Ship to Shore's Aaron Hamel, They will be "working with legendary Japanese publisher Taito and putting out a few compilations of their arcade music, as well as working with Konami on the soundtracks to **Snatcher** and **Lagrange Point**".

There's a new reissue label out there called Stylotone, who are working with the estate of various composers to put out what might be the height of Holy Grail stuff. Case in point: super deluxe vinyl editions of Bernard Herrmann's score to **Twisted Nerve**. There are blood-splattered vinyl editions on both



clear and yellow, with both containing compact disc editions in reproduction sleeves, along with hi-res audio file downloads of all the music and 'film replica' bonus 7-inch, which can also be purchased separately. They will cost you an arm and a leg, as will the Frank Cordell 7-inch for Larry Cohen's **Demon** (which you might know better by the title by which it was recently released on Blu-ray, **God Told Me To**).

Another expensive, heretofore unreleased-on-vinyl score is Riz Ortolani's music for one of Lucio Fulci's best early movies, **Don't Torture a Duckling**. It comes on clear lime-coloured vinyl, along with a poster. This is a very necessary addition to anyone's collection, regardless of cost. Ortolani's gorgeous music may run a bit towards



the schmaltzy, but this rather morose score elevates his compositions.

For a rather more affordable reissue, check out Silva Screen's BBC Radiophonic Workshop – 21. It's a full compact disc and digital version of the 21st-anniversary compilation that celebrated the output of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop back in 1979. It has pretty much every piece of music you could possibly want across its 45 tracks, from Delia Derbyshire's masterful themes for **Doctor Who** and **Great Zoos of the World** to Richard Yeoman-Clark's **Mysterioso**, from **Blake's 7**. It sounds absolutely brilliant and just as otherworldly and futuristic as it did 37 years ago.

Affordability and quality also go hand in hand with the latest selections from Intrada: Miklós Rózsa's **The Golden Voyage Of Sinbad** and **The Twilight Zone**, featuring '22 scores from these first two seasons of the mid '80s revival of **The Twilight Zone**', both on compact disc, as well as the **Transformers: The Movie** score by Vince DiCola on double vinyl LP. The LPs are 180-gram vinyl, with the classic cover art from the original release. A soundtrack of the **Transformers** movie was released by Legacy Recordings last November, which featured the pop songs from the film, such as Stan Bush's iconic **The Touch**. This marks the vinyl debut of DiCola's score.

You're definitely going to love the latest cinematic homage news from Cineploit. Over the last year, Organso Sonore has been publishing music via Soundcloud, as part of a project they call Themes International. The idea was, per the project's Soundcloud, "to compose and record music for twenty-two randomly selected themes inside a given time of two weeks for each theme". Themes ranged from composers like John Carpenter and Stelvio Cipriani to genres as wide-ranging as 'Turkish psych' and 'KPM library.' They're absolutely amazing in their diversity and creativity, and the album compiling these excursions is due out in May. There will be two different vinyl versions of the LP: one black and one coloured, with the latter only available direct from Cineploit. There's also a compact disc version.





# BRAVE NEW WORDS

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## ANCILLARY JUSTICE Added to the 2016 Seiun Awards Shortlist

The 55th Japan Science Fiction Convention (Nihon SF Taikai) has announced the 2016 Seiun Awards nominees. Some of the nominees include: Best Translated Novel (translator in brackets) - **Ancillary Justice** by Anne Leckie (Hideko Akao), **Zendegi** by Greg Egan (Makoto Yamagishi), **Ack-Ack Macaque** by Gareth L. Powell (Kazuyo Misumi), **The Water Knife** by Paola Bacigalupi (Naoya Nakahara), **The Violent Century** by Ravi Tidoha (Ken Mogi), and **Vulcan's Hammer** by Philip K. Dick (Tatsuo Sato). Best Translated Short Story - **Good Hunting** by Ken Liu (Yoshimichi Furusawa), **The Road of Needles** by Caitlin R. Kiernan (Jun Suzuki), **White Sin, Now** by Tanith Lee (Izumi Ichida), **Mask** by Stanislaw Lem (Koichi Kuyama), **Relays and Roses** by Gene Wolfe (Takao Miyawaki), **Alfred's Ark** by Jack Vance (Toru Nakamura), and **Beautiful Boys** by Theodora Goss (Jun Suzuki).

## Australian Aurealis Awards 2015 Announced

The winners of the 2015 Aurealis Awards were announced at a ceremony at the Australian National Convention in Brisbane over the Easter weekend. Top honours went to: Best Children's Fiction - **A Single Stone**, Meg McKinlay (Walker Books Australia) Best Graphic Novel/Illustrated Work - **The Singing Bones**, Shaun Tan (Allen & Unwin) Best Young Adult Short Story - **The Miseducation of Mara Lys**, Deborah Kalin (Cherry Crow Children, Twelfth Planet Press) Best Horror Novel and Best Fantasy Novel - **Day Boy**, Trent Jamieson (Text Publishing) Best Science Fiction Novel - **Illuminae**, Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff (Allen & Unwin)

## Harper Voyager Acquires Jay Kristoff's Latest Series

Harper Voyager is to publish a new epic fantasy series from Jay Kristoff titled **The Nevernight Chronicles**. Kristoff is best known for **The Lotus War** series and Young Adult sci-fi novel **Illuminae**. Kristoff won the Aurealis Award and has been nominated for the David Gemmell Morningstar and Legend awards. The film rights for **Illuminae** were recently acquired by Plan B Entertainment.

Catch **STARBURST's** own book podcast via our website [starburstmagazine.com](http://starburstmagazine.com).

## Aliette de Bodard and NewCon Press Dominate BSFA Awards

Aliette de Bodard has won both the Best Novel and Best Short Story British Science Fiction Association (BSFA) awards, becoming the first person to do so in the long history of the award, which was founded in 1969. **The House of Shattered Wings**, published by Gollancz, won Best Novel and **Three Cups of Grief, By Starlight** bagged her the short story prize.

Author and essayist Adam Roberts won Best Non-fiction for his book **Rave and Let Die**. Best Artwork went to Jim Burns for the cover of **Pelquin's Comet**. Both books are produced by specialist small press publisher NewCon Press.

## China Miéville Headlines Inaugural Balham Literary Festival

Costa-winning author Helen Macdonald, Robert Macfarlane, China Miéville and performance artist Inua Ellams will be headlining the three-day festival, which is curated by Dulwich Books of West Dulwich and will celebrate 'A Way of Being in the World'. The event will take place from Friday June 10th to Sunday June 12th at The Bedford Pub in Balham. Sounds like an excellent place for a bookish party!

## Eastercon 2017 and 2018 Secured

The next two years' locations for major UK SF literature convention Eastercon have been announced. The 2017 Eastercon will be called Innominat, though most of the fans seem to want to call it simply Eastercon 2017. It will be held over April 14th – 17th at the Hilton Metropole at the NEC, Birmingham. The Guests of Honour are author Pat Cadigan, artist Judith Clute, and SMOF (Secret Master of Fandom) Colin Harris. The event is a last-minute replacement for Pasgon, a Cardiff-based Eastercon that was cancelled due to logistic issues.

2018's Eastercon was also announced at the recent Mancunicon. It is to be named Follycon and will be held March 30th – April 2nd, 2018 at The Majestic Hotel, Harrogate. Guests of honour include Kieron Gillen, Nnedi Okorafor, and Kim Stanley Robinson. SF fan Christina Lake is also a guest of honour.

## Iain Banks' classic FEERSUM ENDJINN to become SF Masterwork

Gollancz has added Iain M. Banks' novel **Feersum Endjinn** to its range of SF Masterworks edition. The SF Masterworks list includes more than 100 books and contains 'many of the finest voices' in British and world science fiction.

The Masterworks edition of **Feersum Endjinn** will include a new introduction by Ken MacLeod. **Feersum Endjinn** was originally published in 1994 and won a BSFA award that year. The novel is set on a far future Earth where mankind's technological progress has declined and reversed, making super advanced tech almost magical. The uploading of mindstates into a world-spanning computer network called the crypt is commonplace, making reincarnation a tangible thing.

## Ramez Naam wins the Philip K. Dick Award

Ramez Naam has won the Philip K. Dick Award for his book **Apex**, published by Angry Robot Books. The award is given for 'distinguished science fiction published in paperback original form in the United States'. The winner was announced over the Easter at Norwescon 39 in SeaTac, Washington USA. Norwescon is the Pacific Northwest's premier science fiction and fantasy convention. The award is presented annually with the support of the Philip K. Dick Trust and is sponsored by the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society.



ED FORTUNE  
HIGHLIGHTS  
NOTEWORTHY  
NEW TITLES

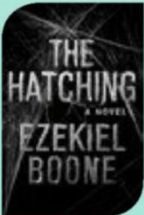
# COMING SOON



## FALSE HEARTS

AUTHOR: LAURA LAM  
PUBLISHER: MACMILLAN  
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 16TH

Laura Lam delivers cults, super drugs and twin dilemma with her latest work, **False Hearts**. Set in a world where serious crime is very rare, the book follows former conjoined twin Taema, who is forced to work with the San Francisco police to clear the name of her sister. The cops suspect a powerful drug syndicate is involved, along with the trade of a strange substance called Verve. Taema now discovers that Tila had found links between the cult and the city's criminal underworld. The twins were once unable to keep secrets, but will learn the true cost of lies.



## THE HATCHING

AUTHOR: EZEKIEL BOONE  
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ  
RELEASE DATE: JULY 5TH

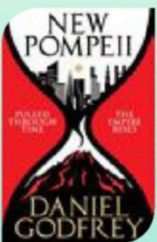
In the midst of the Peruvian jungle, a black, skittering mass consumes a group of American tourists. FBI agents make a grisly discovery at the site of a fatal plane crash in Minneapolis. Strange earthquakes, mass panic, and a nuclear strike in China all point to a growing crisis. A parcel from South America is delivered to Melanie Guyer's laboratory in Washington. The contents, an unusual egg, starts to crack; all of these things are connected as the world begins to fall apart. Compared positively to Michael Crichton at his best, the buzz around this book is very exciting.



## ESCAPOLOGY

AUTHOR: REN WAROM  
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS  
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 14TH

We utterly adore Ren Warom's writing over at STARBURST Towers, mostly for her evocative and imaginative approach to sci-fi, so we've high hopes for **Escapology**. Set in a cyberpunk like world, **Escapology** introduces us to Shock Pao, the best thief in a virtual world known as The Slip. Outside the Slip, Shock has very few prospects and no job. The genius thief swiftly finds himself drawn into a world of crime, deception, and delicate balances. Sounds like **Mr Robot** meets **Neuromancer** to us, so we can't wait.



## NEW POMPEII

AUTHOR: DANIEL GODFREY  
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS  
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 21ST

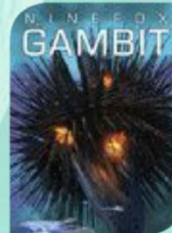
**Jurassic Park** meets **Gladiator** in this marvellous-looking tale of time travel and human weakness. When energy giant NovusPart discovers the ability to scoop people from the distant past into the future, it seems that they're dead set on saving the people of Pompeii moments before the volcano hits. The company has built a replica of the city and populated it with thousands of real Romans. For post-grad historian Nick Houghton it's a unique chance to learn about the past. But at what cost to the future?



## THE SOMNAMBULIST AND THE PSYCHIC THIEF

AUTHOR: LISA TUTTLE  
PUBLISHER: JO FLETCHER BOOKS  
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 16TH

Tuttle's latest novel tells the tale of Miss Lane, former companion and collaborator to the lady known to the Psychical Society only as Miss X. Alas, Miss X has been uncovered as a fake. Now she works with consulting detective Mr Jasper Jespersion, but the cases are not as plentiful as they might be and money is getting tight, until the sleepwalker arrives... Expect a somnambulist, the disappearance of several mediums and a cat stuck up a tree, as well as being introduced to Jespersion and Lane, consulting detectives.



## NINEFOX GAMBIT

AUTHOR: YOON HA LEE  
PUBLISHER: SOLARIS  
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 14TH

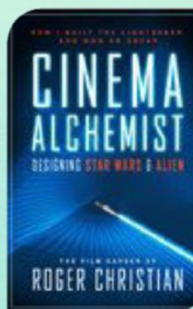
Described as brutal and striking space opera, Yoon Ha Lee's **Ninefox Gambit** promises to be epic in its scope. The story follows disgraced Captain Kel Cheris, who is seen as loose cannon by many. She is given the occasion to redeem herself by recapturing the Fortress of Scattered Needles, a seemingly indomitable task, critical to the war. Cheris' best hope is to ally with formerly dead hero Shuos Jedao. Though Jedao has never lost a battle, his methods are so outrageous that doom may well be inevitable. Sounds like good stuff to us.



## THE SHADOWED PATH

AUTHOR: GAIL Z. MARTIN  
PUBLISHER: SOLARIS  
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 14TH

Gail Z. Martin returns to her beloved protagonist Jonmarc Vahanian in this collection of short stories. Set in the same world as her **Chronicles of the Necromancer** and **Fallen Kings Cycle** books, this anthology promises to be a sort of 'Jonmarc Begins', with tales detailing Vahanian's early exploits as a soldier, fight slave, smuggler, brigand lord, and warrior. Prepare to discover more about this pivotal character.



## CINEMA ALCHEMIST

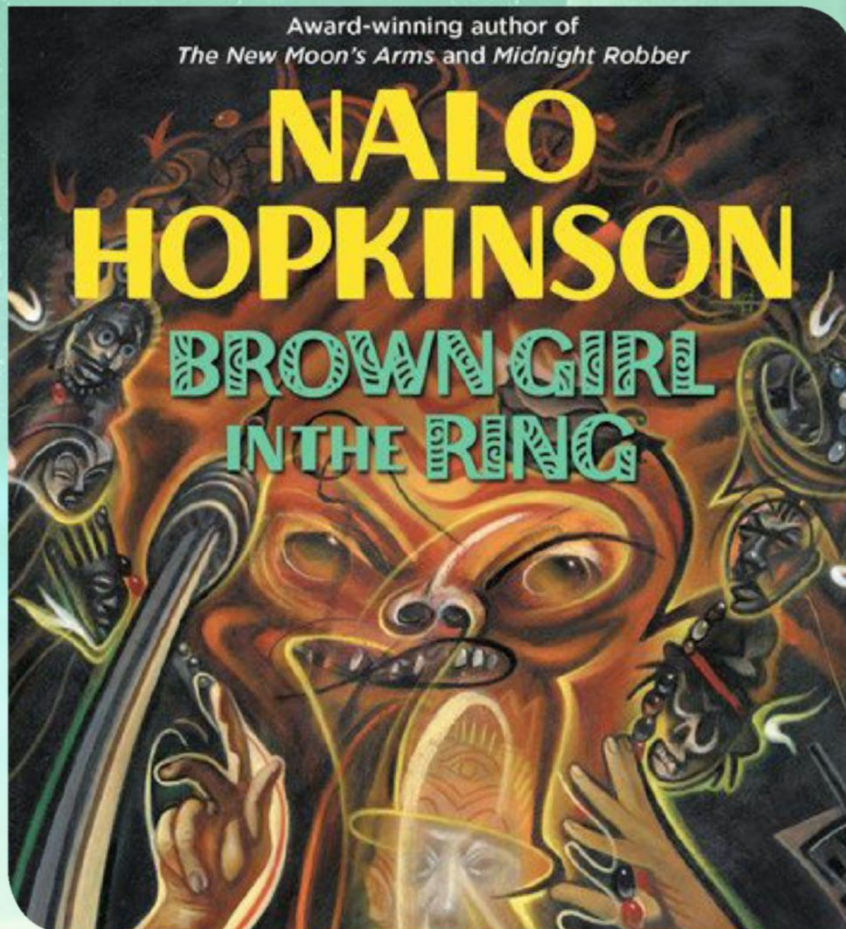
AUTHOR: ROGER CHRISTIAN  
PUBLISHER: TITAN  
RELEASE DATE: JULY 26TH

We do love a good autobiography, especially when it's by someone as interesting as Roger Christian. The Oscar-winning production designer and director talks about his earliest work in the British film industry. He explores his breakthrough contributions on such legendary sci-fi classics as **Star Wars** (he designed the lightsaber!), **Alien**, and his own recently rediscovered short **Black Angel**. Delve into the secrets of the industry with a master of the art.



# BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK  
OF GENRE FICTION  
BY KATE FATHERS



In the not-too-distant future, Toronto is known as the Burn. After riots and a collapsed economy, all the money upped sticks and moved to the suburbs. The too-stubborn and the too-poor stayed behind – the immigrants and street kids and a gang lord who lives in the CN Tower – eking out a life for themselves in the shell of Ontario's Capital city. Ti-Jeanne lives at Riverdale Farm with her grandmother and new baby, avoiding her ex-boyfriend and begrudgingly learning the herbalist trade. She doesn't tell anyone about the visions she has. She just wants to get through the day. But when the gang lord asks Ti-Jeanne's ex-boyfriend to find a human organ donor for an ailing Premier, she discovers that she can't hide forever. And that she has more ties to the city – and the spirit world – than she knows.

In the back of the 2012 Reading Group edition, the very first question asks if Nalo Hopkinson's Toronto is a realistic vision of the future. Clearly whoever wrote that has

never been to Detroit. I'm not sure if it was Hopkinson's intention, but what she's written is a condensed version of Detroit's decades-long decay. You can see it in the rioting, the court cases, and the corruption; in the rotting neighbourhoods, the boarded-up windows, and the rise in violent crime. It's in the way visitors come only for the nightlife, barely touching the sidewalk and ignoring anything that isn't illuminated by neon, and the devaluing of the residents who can't afford to leave. There's something naïve and infuriating about a question that assumes that a place like Detroit could only exist in fantasy, and I think that says a lot about how we treat areas in crisis. Particularly when these areas, like Detroit and Hopkinson's Toronto, are predominantly home to people of colour. It makes me think that perhaps this parallel was intentional. I think Hopkinson saw a reality that is often overlooked: sometimes laughed at, and used fantasy to draw attention to it. *Brown Girl in the Ring* is unapologetically

demanding and judgmental, and while it can be read as a cautionary tale, I think it's first and foremost a two-hundred page scream in the face of injustice.

Helping readers navigate this setting is Ti-Jeanne. I love Ti-Jeanne. She's a wonderfully complex character, and Hopkinson allows us to see all sides of her: her wisdom when she leaves her gang-connected and drug-addicted boyfriend, Tony; her weakness when she lets herself be drawn back to him; her strength when she stands up to her grandmother for the first time. Ti-Jeanne's character is very much tied to other people, and the best part of her story is seeing her create an independent identity. She spends the whole book analysing the world around her and cherry picking the bits she wants for herself, and while at first it looks like she might be stepping in to someone else's shoes, she doesn't. In the end, she is wholly herself. The fantastical elements of the novel are tied to this, because Ti-Jeanne starts off as being very skeptical of spirits. She has visions of other people's deaths, and of Caribbean gods, and yet she refuses to acknowledge them. And while in the end she accepts the fantastical and lets it in to her life, it's at her own comfort level. Hopkinson has written a realistic transformation, where the character we end with still feels like the woman we first met. She has grown and changed, but just like in real life, she is not finished. Ti-Jeanne still has a lot of living to do.

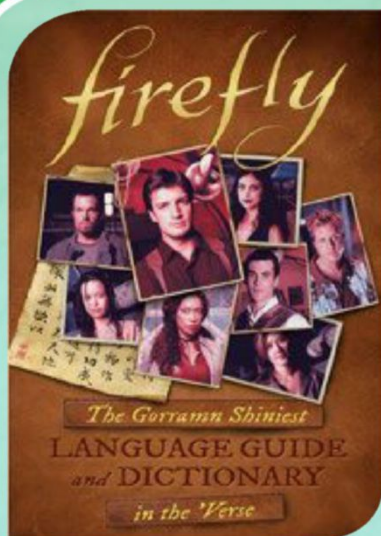
The strength of *Brown Girl in the Ring* is in its ability to both teach and entertain. Hopkinson has given us an absorbing story with vivid characters; a unique fantasy that uses Caribbean religion not for subtle magic realism, but for something big and bold and totally genre. I loved reading a fantasy novel that wasn't rooted in European mythology. A novel where I was unfamiliar with the traditions, and thus the way the magic was going to play out. *Brown Girl in the Ring* itself is a perfect example of why diversity in writing is so important, and Hopkinson's decision to highlight issues of poverty and racism within the text adds to that. The world is big and complicated, and like the writer of the Reading Group questions, we all have gaps in our knowledge. It's the job of fiction – uncomfortable, unfamiliar, demanding fiction – to enlighten us. For me, at least, *Brown Girl in the Ring* has done that job well.

You can find this novel, and Nalo Hopkinson's other work, online and in all good bookshops. Her most recent work, *Falling in Love With Hominids*, was published in 2015.



THE LATEST RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED

# REVIEWS



**FIREFLY: THE GORRAMN SHINIEST DICTIONARY AND PHRASEBOOK IN THE VERSE**  
AUTHOR: MONICA VALENTINELLI / PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 15TH

Despite its short lifespan, the sci-fi TV show *Firefly* continues to draw the crowds; one merely needs to whisper the words 'Firefly reunion' and a league of brown coat-wearing fans will descend upon the news, like a horde of hungry Reavers. So it should come as no surprise that little spin-off items are still coming out.

*Firefly: The Gorrarn Shiniest Dictionary and Phrasebook in the Verse* is one of those odd little tie-in products that you would have never have thought to ask to be bought for you, but you're glad that someone has. Like many good pieces of sci-fi, *Firefly* built its world through language; the little turns of phrase and nicknames for things that the characters used throughout the show drew viewers into the world, in a much more credible way than any piece of exposition could.

All the words and phrases you'd expect are present. For example, we get a breakdown of all the Chinese swearing the various characters express, plus a handy pronunciation guide, just in case you feel the urge to badly mangle Mandarin insults. This doesn't quite make this an ideal cosplay accessory, as the book isn't

designed to be 'in-universe', it's more of a glossy little handbook that will tuck neatly away in the long pockets of a space cowboy costume.

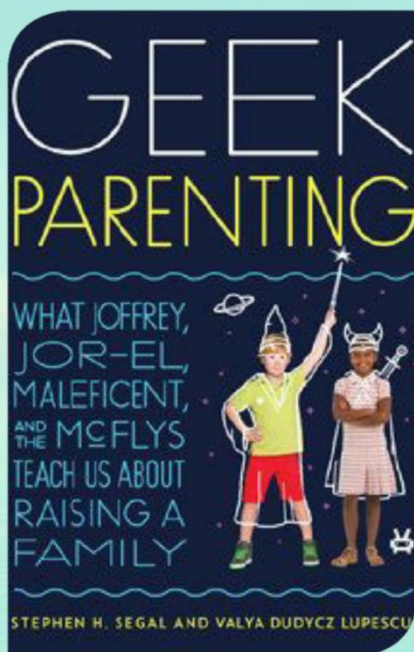
The book is certainly comprehensive; even relatively common phrases that appeared in the show are included. If for some reason you don't know what 'Bone Tired' means, then this book has you covered. It's filled with little gems throughout, mostly stuff that hardcore fans already know, but for the rest of us, it's a treasure trove of *Firefly* trivia.

More importantly, it also defines the names of various cities, weapons and widgets. We all know what model the *Serenity* is, but what about that fancy laser gun from the episode *Heart of Gold*?

Throw in character profiles, illustrations and pictures from the show as well as a chat with the show's language consultant and what we have is a great little sourcebook for fans of the show. As the characters from *Firefly* would say, "Shiny!"

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★ 6



**GEEK PARENTING**  
AUTHORS: STEPHEN H. SEGAL, VALYA DUDYCZ LUPESCU / PUBLISHER: QUIRK BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

There are three simple truths to effective storytelling. You create a hero. Your hero is then assigned a near-impossible mission and then, most importantly of all, you infuse your hero with some seriously repressed, messed up and potentially life-threatening mommy and daddy issues.

In the real world, it's a tough pill to swallow for us fantasy-worshippers that we're not likely (although we're not saying it's impossible) to become parents to the next generation of Peter Parkers and Jessica Jones'. Luckily for us, that doesn't mean that we can't learn from the relationships that our heroes had with their parents and apply them to everyday life, which is just what this helpful compilation of mini-essays sets out to demonstrate.

Divided into five sections, and drawing from examples encompassing the worlds of cinema, literature, and television, *Geek Parenting* is a delight from the start. It's filled with honest advice, with a voice that encourages but never preaches. Highlights include the importance of a good old-fashioned father and son game of baseball (DS9's Benjamin and Jake Sisko), setting boundaries with your kids (Cersei and Joffrey), handling sibling rivalry (Thor and Loki – who else?), as well as accepting them no matter what (Aunt May and Peter Parker). Segal and Lupescu are charming

narrators who present their ideas with warmth, humour, and inclusivity. The essays are short, well researched and make their points effectively, by drawing from significant moments between their chosen characters from works that many science fiction fans are likely to be already familiar with, although be prepared for some surprises.

If there's one criticism to be levelled, it's that the book's length is a little on the short side. Whilst the range of the studies is plentiful, the beauty of this particular genre is that there's such a rich history to choose from that you hope there's a sequel in the pipeline.

If you haven't yet had children (or if you begin panic-cellophaning your mint condition Issue #1's at the very thought), don't be put off by the title; at the very least this collection serves as a poignant index of the very human side of science fiction.

On the other hand, if you are a parent, at least you'll know how best to dialogue when your kid returns home from his science trip with a spider bite and newfound sense of acrobatic ability. Or maybe just when he doesn't get asked to prom. Either way, this is a thoroughly enjoyable compilation.

TOMMY JAMES

★★★★★★ 7





## HEX

**AUTHOR:** THOMAS OLDE HEUVELT  
**TRANSLATOR:** NANCY FOREST-FLIER  
**PUBLISHER:** HODDER & STOUGHTON  
**RELEASE DATE:** APRIL 28TH

Thomas Olde Heuvelt is a well-known Dutch author who has released five novels. Although many of his short stories have been translated into English, *Hex* is the first of his long-form works to undergo this treatment. As such, anticipation is high to see whether the story is as well received outside of his home country.

*Hex* is a unique story. Set in a town known as Black Spring, it revolves around a woman from the 17th century who walks around the town and enters people's homes and will sometimes even watch them sleep. Her eyes are sewn shut.

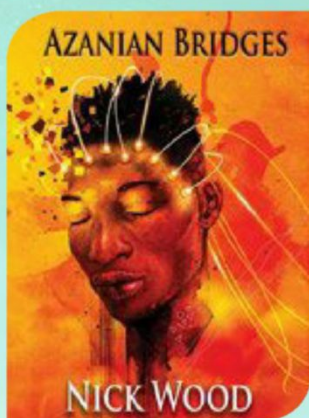
The first few chapters in the novel are chilling, with Heuvelt managing to simply show how normal it is for this witch to turn up in a house. From the start, the novel is very creepy. The teenagers in the novel are quite stereotypical, taking the lead in bad jokes, but are fundamental to the development of the story to show the reader the importance of technology in the town. Applications on phones and cameras are set up to create a sense of ease around the town to show that the witch is under control. However, it isn't long until the teenagers cause trouble and the craziness starts.

*Hex* is a rather chilling novel with a clever concept that is likely to be a hit in the UK. Although some of the characters are less well developed than others, the haunting atmosphere that is created easily generates one of the best works of chilling fiction this year. It is clear why this is the first of Heuvelt's to be translated, and it will likely be followed by many more. An entertaining read with a chilling concept. Not for the faint hearted.

ED FORTUNE



7



## AZANIAN BRIDGES

**AUTHOR:** NICK WOOD  
**PUBLISHER:** NEWCON PRESS  
**RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Set in a South Africa where apartheid never fell, *Azanian Bridges* tells the parallel stories of Sibusiso, a young Zulu tribesman caught up in the struggle for racial equality,

and his interaction with Martin, a white psychologist and creator of a device that allows people to experience each other's thoughts and feelings. In a society maintained by enforced segregation to prevent people seeing each other as equals, the invention's capabilities make it a very dangerous one.

The book has more than a few echoes of the totalitarianism of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, although not with the same dystopic intensity but more a speculation of the kind of authoritarian regime South Africa could very easily have descended into, had apartheid continued and further isolated the country from the rest of the world.

As well as the more overt racism of the security services who murder black people with impunity and without consideration, there are other forms so insidious that those

engaging in it might not even realise it. Martin genuinely believes in his colour-blind perspective, yet is well aware of the perceived inferiority of black people making Sibusiso a more viable (i.e. expendable) test subject for his device. The different ways Sibusiso and Martin are persecuted give striking examples of what white privilege actually means, and in doing so, hold up a mirror to our own modern society, which likes to believe in its notion of equality and justice for all, yet still finds innumerable ways to highlight the superficial differences between each of us, and pre-emptively punish those falling outwith certain applied categories.

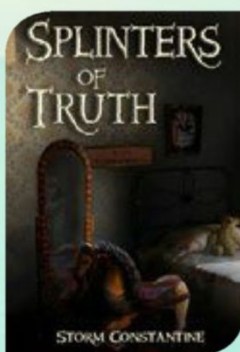
While the book's subject matter is inarguably significant, the style in which it's written leaves something to be desired. The regular injection of Zulu and Afrikaans into, respectively, Sibusiso and

Martin's thoughts may well provide some authenticity of how people think and speak in a multilingual society, but the words frequently lack the necessary context for the reader to establish what they actually mean, and so quickly become annoying. Wood's prose style is one of short, clipped, sentences, that allow for little in the way of personality to come through, as though they are being dictated to us second hand, rather than the characters telling their own story. As a result, the narrative is a flow of statements without empathy, which prevents us from truly experiencing what the characters are thinking and feeling. Which, given the book's central premise, is an unfortunate irony.

ANDREW MARSHALL



6



## SPLINTERS OF TRUTH

**AUTHOR:** STORM CONSTANTINE  
**PUBLISHER:** NEWCON PRESS  
**RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Fans of genre literature will happily tell you that tastes and trends in books come and go.

Currently, the big thing is dystopia and steampunk, though that is in the process of changing. The popular sub-types have launched the careers of some, many of whom will go on to break away from their subgenre of origin into bigger and (hopefully brighter) things. Back in the '80s, however, it wasn't the cogs and brown leather of steampunk that sold books. Instead, bats, black leather and all things Gothpunk defined that era. Amid it all, the undisputed queen of British Gothpunk was Storm Constantine.

*Splinters of Truth* brings together fifteen short stories from throughout Storm's career, including four new tales. Prolific authors often scatter their work across magazines

and small press publications, so it's nice that all of this is finally in one place. The stories themselves are an interesting hodgepodge of ideas that serve as a bit of an overview of Storm's back catalogue.

Many focus on interesting and intelligent characters trying to make their way in the real world, whilst trying to cope with mundane nonsense that tries its level best to crush creative spirits. Others are fragments of what it was like to be Goth in the '80s; these tales are filled with a mix of weird magic, delusion, illusion, and desperate love. Constantine's talent for twisting the mundane and making it dark and delicious shines out on each page, making the whole thing fascinating reading.

As this is a collection drawn from the breadth of her career, the stories do vary in quality. Some feel rushed, as if too much has been crammed into a short space, whilst others stretch out one idea for too long. This pacing isn't much of an issue because each tale is a gem in its own right. The collection also includes a *Wraeththu* story, which is sure to delight followers of that quintessential Gothpunk series.

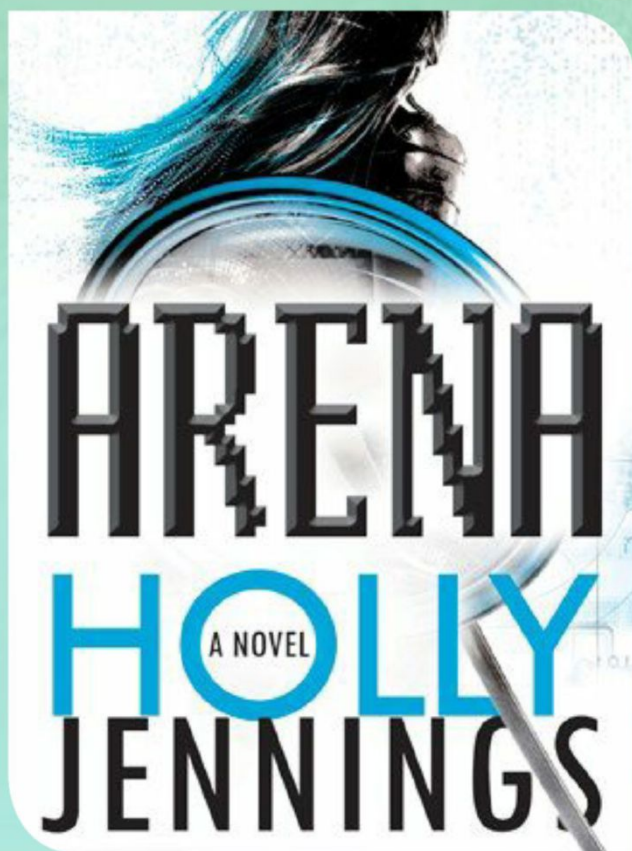
*Splinters of Truth* is a great way to get into one of the most genre-defining authors of the age. Stick on *The Mission* or a spot of *Sisters of Mercy*, scrawl on the eyeliner and dive in.

ED FORTUNE



7





## ARENA

AUTHOR: HOLLY JENNINGS / PUBLISHER: ACE BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

2054. Virtual gaming has gone mainstream. The Rage Tournaments are the new Super Bowl, and 20-year-old warrior Kali Ling is fast on her

way to becoming the MVP of sports entertainment. That is, until her usually unbeatable team Defiance suffers an embarrassing defeat and

Nathan, her teammate/lover, overdoses in her bed.

Ling is ordered to take over Nathan's captaincy and must guide her fragmented team to victory, whilst navigating the pitfalls of a life in the spotlight, a team owner more concerned with sponsorship deals than the welfare of his players, mandatory therapy sessions, and integrating Nathan's replacement - the brooding and mysterious James Rooke - into her team. Duke Nukem never had to deal with any of this shiz!

Holly Jennings' debut novel is a well-told and ambitious story, which unfortunately never maximises its full potential. It's made clear immediately that the characters are never in genuine jeopardy; once they lose their lives in the virtual world, they merely return to the regular one, train harder, hit clubs, and tease the paparazzi. Their main rivals, InvictUS, aren't featured heavily enough to be considered a threat on any personal level, and for that reason, it's hard to take them seriously as dangerous antagonists.

Most curious of all is the titular setting of the arena itself. Given that this is a world where technology has advanced to the point where humans can be transported into real-life avatars, it's hard not to wonder at the lack of variety shown in the scenery on the battlefield.

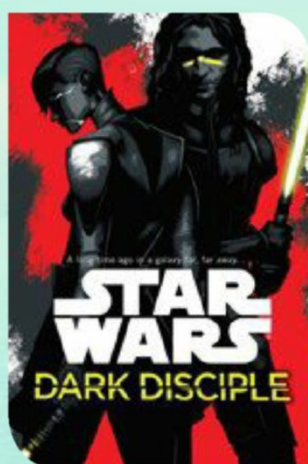
Skilled pioneer Ling is an excellent choice of protagonist;

particularly at a time when even sci-fi heavyweights like Black Widow cannot command their own franchise, it's refreshing to see a young woman willfully take the reigns in a sport dominated by men. That being said, the attitude that is refreshing to begin with quickly grows weary, although her verbal sparring with Rooke remains entertaining throughout. The rest of the team (Nathan's former rival Derek, and lovers Hannah and Lily) are given little to do, in terms of their own development. Derek's lack of resentment at losing his place as head of the team reeks of missed opportunity, and the romance between Hannah and Lily is remarkably obstacle-free. There's no foul play to Nathan's demise, nor is any suspected. Rooke is a welcome addition, as is the subplot of Ling's growing drug dependency, but the summation of both these plot points lacks the twists you'd expect.

Younger readers will appreciate the concept and entertaining fight scenes, but anyone who spent a significant portion of their formative years sat in a darkened room, barking orders into a headset, while fending off vaguely homophobic slurs from 14-year-old boys, may find themselves frustrated that the player setting on this novel is firmly set to safe.

TOMMY JAMES

★★★★★ 5



## DARK DISCIPLE

AUTHOR: CHRISTIE GOLDEN  
PUBLISHER: ARROW  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Despite ending prematurely in order to make way for Rebels, Clone Wars was a series with a vast amount of potential

and great ideas. With many plot threads, scripts, and ideas left floating about, it was only natural that someone would adapt them into a full novel. In the case of Dark Disciple, this was to help finish off the story arcs surrounding conflicted Jedi Quinlan Vos and the now-renegade Asajj Ventress. Their task? Hunt down and assassinate Count Dooku, ending his threat once and for all.

The story is simple, focusing on two popular background characters and following an interesting arc that is perfect for both Vos and Ventress. With both having switched sides and barely escaped brushes with the Dark Side, they are the best assassins to bring down Dooku and understand the threat he poses. Both have seen him fighting first-hand and the novel always utilises their growing distrust and tension as a great source of meaningful conflict. Atop of this, having gone

undercover, their questions of what it truly means to be a Jedi work surprisingly well, although there's sadly nothing we've not seen before. This is the problem here; the book might be competently written when it comes to the fight scenes, but fans of Star Wars are extremely familiar with this song and dance. We've seen Vos doing this before, we've seen Jedi like Jacen Solo tempted by the Dark Side - as this has been far more meaningfully explored in other stories, so much of Dark Disciple seems like a simple rehashing of over-used tropes.

Even the book itself is more reliant upon favoured characters than building new ones. While the Jedi Council (including an oddly out of character Mace Windu) are understandable, the massive ensemble of notable bounty hunters led by Boba Fett are not so much. These characters are there purely for fan service,

and even the major outcome of their big fight scene is barely covered. This in and of itself might have been fine, but even the story's very structure is flawed, matching the television series too closely. There is little environmental description, or atmospheric detail of any kind, and the overall pacing is oddly stretched out; meaning the story often makes you want to start skipping pages. With the addition of a few too many unexplained switches in allegiances, the book gradually devolves into an exercise in frustration.

Dark Disciple is unremarkable and, while it has a few good ideas, the execution is lacklustre. If this is the standard to which the new and improved Disney-driven setting plans to stick to, then we were better off with the Expanded Universe.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

★★★★★ 4



Even the ashes of the past cannot  
hide the truth forever

# The MAP of BONES

'Holds a mirror up to our obsession  
with perfection' *Guardian*

## INTERVIEW - FRANCESCA HAIG

Sci-fi/Fantasy author Francesca Haig grew up in Tasmania, gained her PhD from the University of Melbourne and was a senior lecturer at the University of Chester. Her first novel, the post-apocalyptic *THE FIRE SERMON*, was published in 2015 and quickly gained a cult following. We caught up with her to find out more about the sequel, *THE MAP OF BONES*...

**STARBURST:** Tell us a little bit about *The Map of Bones*...

Francesca Haig: There are two things going on. On an internal level, after the events of *The Fire Sermon*, Cass is trying to make sense of everything that has happened, and to find a reason to keep going. In terms of the bigger picture, the conflict is spreading. The stakes are getting bigger. It looks back to before the blast that destroyed everything. It takes us both forward in action and backwards in time a little bit to consider how the world ended up in the wrecked state that we discovered in *The Fire Sermon*.

In the books, everyone is a twin and that gets quite odd in places. Where does that idea come from? It's definitely creepy, I get that a lot. I wish I could say something lovely and neat like 'I am a twin'.

My publicist would have loved it if I produced a twin out of the hat. I think it's not really to do with twins at all. It's this idea of being really, really close to someone and asking yourself the question 'could I live without them?' Be it a lover, parent, partner, or a child, if I lost this person could I even live? So the idea of the twins just literalises that idea that if one twin dies so does the other. I've made it a sibling bond in a very sci-fi supernatural way. It's being so close to someone that your life feels literally intertwined with theirs.

**It's got some very strong themes. What would you say its core message is?**

I'm always a bit wary when the word message comes into play. I think there's nothing more likely to turn readers off a book than

when it's didactic and preachy. I didn't set out to write a book with a message, but I think if you read a book with a scorched Earth, you can't read that and not think about climate change. It's funny, the book deals with a post-nuclear world, but I probably had climate change more on my mind. This is not to say we shouldn't give up on the thought of imminent nuclear destruction, but the changing climate seems more pressing.

I did think of that while I was writing, but I would absolutely hate if the reader thought that first and foremost the book had an important social message about climate change. I would be devastated if that was the message they came away with. I want the readers to come away from it thinking 'Gee, I'd like to bang Piper and I'd like to have a coffee with Cass'. Get caught up with the characters, not the book's message, if it has one.

**Who's your favourite character from the series?**

Zoe, without a doubt. I had a lot of fun with her; tough as nails, really spiky, just so much fun to write. I also really enjoyed writing Kip. A lot of my friends and family who have read the book have said that Kip's sarcastic asides remind them of me. I don't know if that's a good thing because a lot of people really don't like Kip! A friend was convinced I only put Kip in the book to piss people off. Obviously, I'm Team Kip because they have elements of me in them.

**Why did you choose to write a Young Adult novel?**

I'm not convinced that it is YA. No one seems entirely sure. I wasn't really thinking about audience when I was writing and I think most authors probably aren't, you just tell the story that you have to tell. By the official definition of YA, the book shouldn't really fit because the main character Cass is in her early twenties; though there are flashbacks to her childhood, along with her twin, Zach. Officially, it doesn't fit with the characteristics of YA, but the main character is a young woman in a dystopian world. So when there was a bit of hype surrounding the first book, people said it was a bit like *The Hunger Games*, which meant YA. I'll be thrilled if the YA audience has embraced it. I find those terms are really useful to marketers, but less so to writers and, of course, readers will just read what they want to read.

**Why do you think dystopian fiction is so popular?**

I always resist the idea that dystopian fiction is a new trend. There have been some wildly successful dystopian novels recently, particularly in YA. Dystopian fiction has been kicking around for a long time. I don't think it's a bandwagon and I don't think it's going anywhere. I don't think it's a new trend. I think humans have always been asking questions and dystopian fiction lets us ask some really big ones such as 'what's the worst that can happen?' and 'what can I do in a broken world?' All those big juicy questions that we can get our teeth into with dystopian fiction!

**Is the genre literature community as diverse as it needs to be?**

I don't think we are there yet in terms of diversity in sci-fi and fantasy. I think there are tremendous strides being taken though. If you think about female writers, for example, unquestionably so many of my favourite fantasy authors who are the best in the field are women. This isn't anything new. In terms of reviewing space, women are still in a disadvantage. *The Fire Sermon* deals with issues of disability and it also touches on the issues of race. One that doesn't get dealt with enough is class. We talk about sex and gender, and LGBTQ issues, but I think class is greatly unexplored in genre. So we've always got further to go.

**If you met the sixteen-year-old version of yourself right now, what advice would you give?**

I think the first thing I would do is run a mile! At sixteen, I was a nightmare. I think I'd say to myself 'be nice to your parents and shut up'.

**What's next for you?**

I'm neck deep in deadlines for book three of *The Fire Sermon*. I've got a few things planned. I'd love to write a crime novel set in the English Department of a university and I've got what would be described as a literary novel, though that's the most nebulous of all genre terms. Sadly, it's not going to be sci-fi or fantasy. I'm going to take a break and try something different.

ED FORTUNE

***THE MAP OF BONES* is published by Harper Voyager and is available at all good bookstores, as well as available online.**



# EDGE -Lit.

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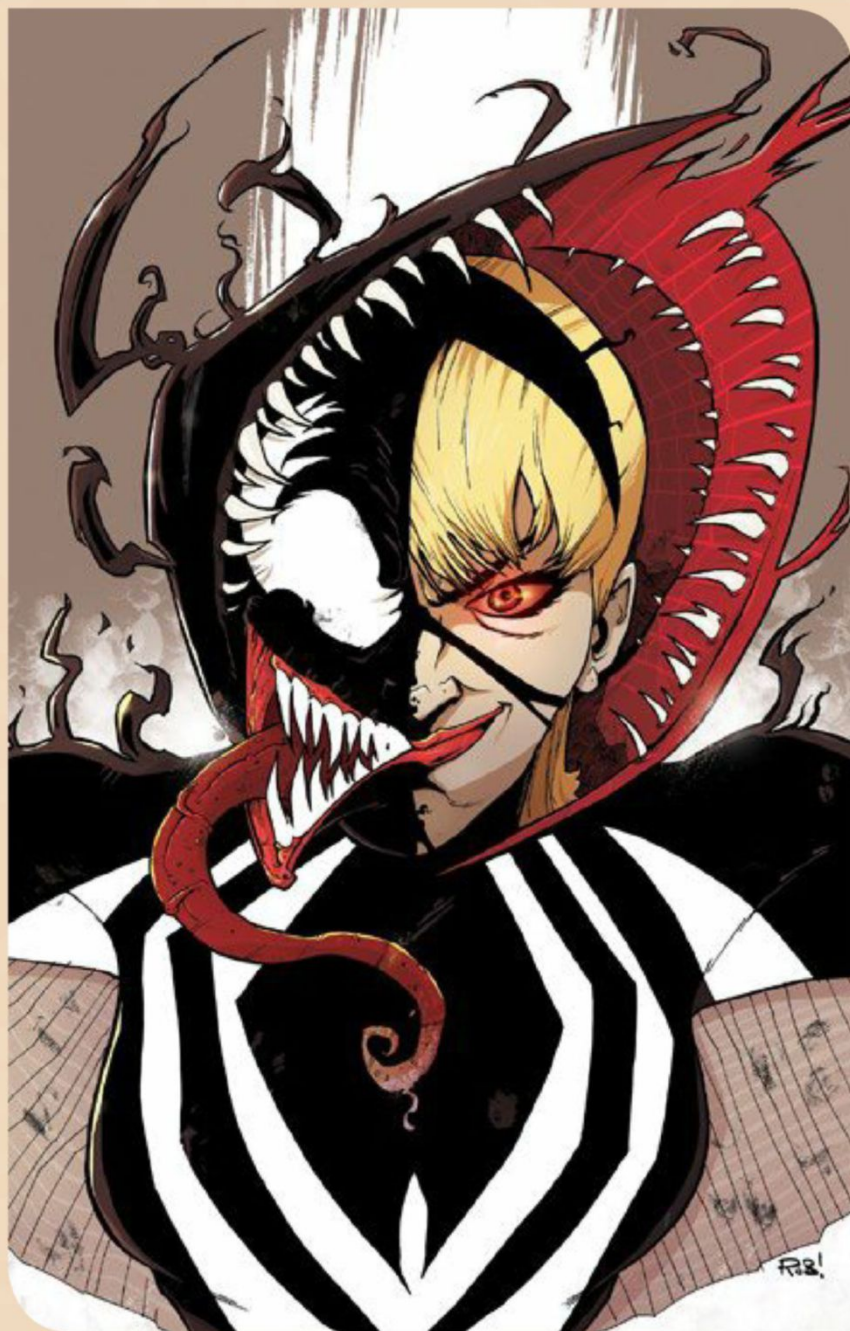
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# VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS  
MONITOR DUTY  
TO BRING YOU THE  
LATEST FROM  
THE WORLD OF  
COMIC BOOKS



post (or rather parallel to) death, taking on the mantles of Spider-Gwen, Gwenpool and the like. Now you can add, uh, Gwenom to the list. That's Spider-Gwen meets Venom, spinning out of a variant cover (*Guardians of Knowhere #1*), which proved popular enough with fans to spin off into a full, actual thing. A full, actual thing lasting roughly a year, according to creators Robbi Rodriguez, Jason Latour, and Rico Renzi; and it's apparently writer Rodriguez's swansong too, as he has announced his plans to retire upon the story's completion.

Elsewhere at Marvel, things can be seen heating up in anticipation of *Civil War II* and *Dead No More*, the publisher's most notable events. The former not-so coincidentally coinciding with Captain America's third outing of the same name hitting cinemas. Unlike *Captain America: Civil War*'s plot, however, this one looks to be all (or in part) down to The Inhumans, Marvel's effort to make people care about the not-X-Men even in the face of people not caring about The Inhumans. Will *Civil War II* turn the tide? Who's to say? Steve and Tony are still set to wind up on opposing sides though, because synergy.

Answers have (possibly) presented themselves for the other thing though, as Gwen Stacy (her again!) has shown up in promotional material for *Dead No More*, standing next to a guy in a dog's mask. Whether or not Gwen is the key (too obvious?), it's looking to be a very Spidey-centric event, with The Lizard, Rhino, and Electro joining in on the party. Although the last time we saw The Lizard, Rhino, Electro, and Gwen Stacy in a Spider-Man series, that didn't exactly turn out to be (ahem) amazing. Nevertheless, *Dead No More* is set to kick off on May 7th.

To DC then, where the very biggest news is in their rebirth of the New 52, set to begin this June. Last month, I brought you news of the renumbering and rebooting of several lines and titles (in addition to *Action Comics* and *Detective Comics* resetting to their old, pre-New 52 numbering) and that continues, with new books and creative teams constantly being announced. Rather than simply resetting everything back to how it was, DC has promised more of a 'spiritual' rebirth, crossing the bridge between the best of both worlds; characters as we recognise them, and as they should be (ish), in a continuity that'll presumably pick and choose

**W**ritten as of March 31st, so as to avoid Make Up Stupid News on April 1st Day, the bane of every avid entertainment news website reader's (and compiler's) day. Not that making up a bit of news wouldn't help beef up

the old word count and, indeed, live up what tends to be among the most vanilla months of the year, where things always dry up a little.

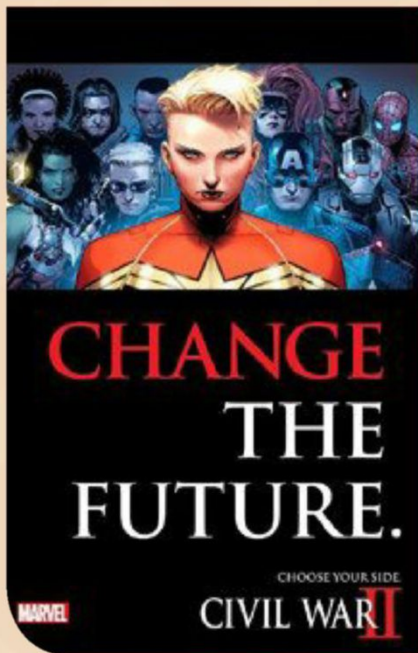
Not an April Fool's joke: the curious and continued popularity of Gwen Stacy,





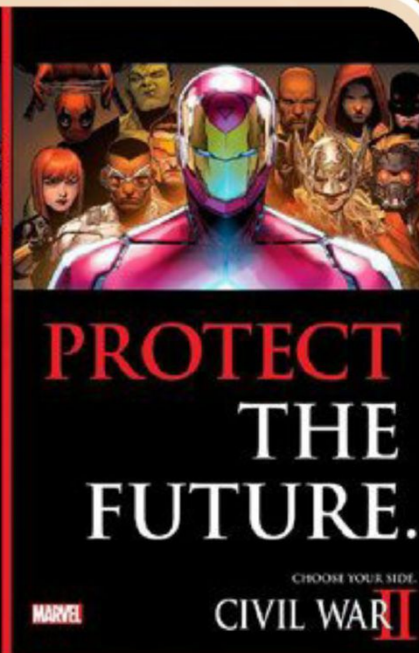
everything which worked pre- and post-New 52. That'll get you Greg Rucka on *Wonder Woman*, and issues #957 and #934 of *Action* and *Detective* comics. It all begins in earnest with *DC Comics: Rebirth #1*, so if you're only going to pick up one book throughout it all, you should probably make it that one. The question on everyone's lips: will we see a return of the red trunks? Only time will tell.

Two very popular things: DC Comic book heroes and Young Adult novels. Now the two are set to collide as some of DC's most iconic heroes prepare themselves for the YA treatment. DC has joined forces with Random House to corner this hitherto undiscovered area of the market, kicking off with a *Wonder Woman* book for August of 2017 (written



by Leigh Bardugo), followed by Batman (Marie Lu), Superman (Matt de la Peña), and Catwoman (Sarah J. Maas), all fine picks for the younger (presumably female-orientated) market. Expect much soul-rending melancholy and most likely a love triangle or two, somewhere along the way (Silver St. Cloud vs. Julie Madison? What's a Bat to do?!).

Talking of the Bat (I rarely talk of anything else, so apologies for the bias), I reported last month that Bruce Wayne's Batman was set to return, thereby letting Commissioner Gordon get back to Commissioning and Alfred to despairing for his master's future. Batman indeed Returns, bringing a new costume with him. Nothing too extensive, although the new belt is pretty nifty. This is set to replace



Jim Lee's New 52 design, spreading out across the Bat books in time.

A quieter month this one, as mid-to-late spring can tend to be, setting the stage for the rest of the year rather than any big announcements or shock happenings. And so, it's on this note that we inevitably wrap up another edition of your faithful **View from the Watchtower**. As ever, I can be reached in the interim period between now and the next edition at the usual Twitter and E-mail handles. You can even talk to me about non-Gwen Stacy, Gwenpool or Gwenom related Gnews if you like. ✦

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# REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC  
BOOK RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



## APES 'N' CAPES BUNDLE

WRITER & ARTIST: GRÁINNE MCENTEE AND  
MATT ROOKE / PUBLISHER: BOUNCE COMICS /  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Indie Comics creators Bounce Comics recently put the first four of their Apes and Capes series into a handy bundle, which gives us the perfect excuse to review the series so far as a whole.

As the name suggests, this series is mostly about a spot of monkey business. The world has ended and humanity has pretty much had its day. English-speaking primates roam across a mostly overgrown world; the land is now a mad sprawl of plant-life, nature clearly taking back the world from mankind's effort to tame it.

Post-apocalyptic worlds in which the apes are in charge aren't anything new, of course, but there's plenty of room in the subgenre for more ideas. Comic book creators Gráinne McEntee and Matt Rooke have taken the more leisurely approach here. Apes and Capes moves slowly but each chapter builds on the established backstory. In this world, it's not just our closest genetic cousins who have received a bit of a uplift. Bears are also as smart as humans and seem to have the most privilege. Certainly the bears appear to have formed a society that is more of a corporate mafia than anything else.

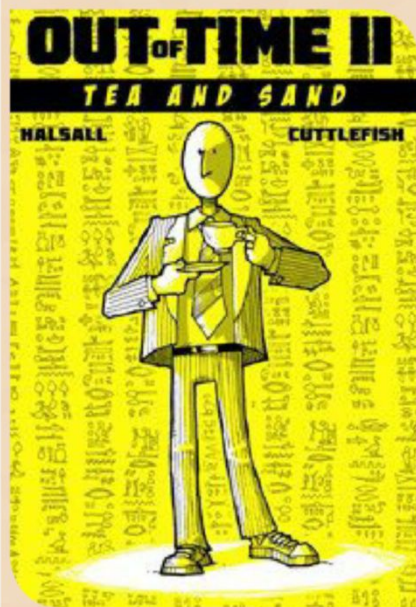
Meanwhile, a brave orangutan hero is swinging from tree to tree, trying his best to

seek justice whilst wearing a cowl and cape. His actions will change the fate of all, be they ape, bear or even human. The pace really is quite slow throughout, but this suits the world building very well. The world has changed a lot and there is a lot to get through. The art does a solid job of letting us dive into this strange and new world, with much of the storytelling being left to the art.

A back up strip, which is set during the 'current' time, also provides some backstory and plenty of humour. Apparently, Macaques in Edinburgh zoo have full-on Scottish accents; who knew? Overall, these first four issues of Apes and Capes are good solid indie fun and we can't wait to see where the series goes next.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★ 7



## OUT OF TIME TWO

WRITER: LUKE HALSALL / ARTIST: CUTTFISH  
/ PUBLISHER: CUTTFISH COMICS / RELEASE  
DATE: OUT NOW

Sometimes, you just want a comic book to be flat-out silly fun. Halsall and Cuttfish's previous book, Out of Time, did exactly that. The premise is quite daft; bored office workers have the power to go back in time, thanks in part to a colleague who just happens to be a butterfly with special reality warping powers. We assume that it's related to the butterfly that's either always flapping it's wings and causing storms, or the one that someone should avoid treading on when they go back in time. Which makes for a pretty powerful insect, when you think about it.

Cuttfish's art is brilliant in its simplicity. Stark and basic colours are used to evoke various moods throughout the book, and also become a sort of running joke. The character design itself is fairly brilliant. For example, a character whose main characteristic is blandness has a pretty featureless face. The minimalist style is reminiscent of Rob Schrab's SCUD The Disposable Assassin. This lends itself to a straightforward storytelling style that makes it easy for the tale to veer off into the frankly surreal without it being too much of a jolt.

This is fortunate, because Halsall is very fond of going into deeply weird

territory as swiftly as he can. Just when you thought it couldn't get odder, it really does, in a way that might remind readers of classic indie books such as Tales from Sleaze Castle. The script does suffer from some overly clunky and exposition-laden dialogue in places, but it's a necessary evil as this is a pretty short comic book.

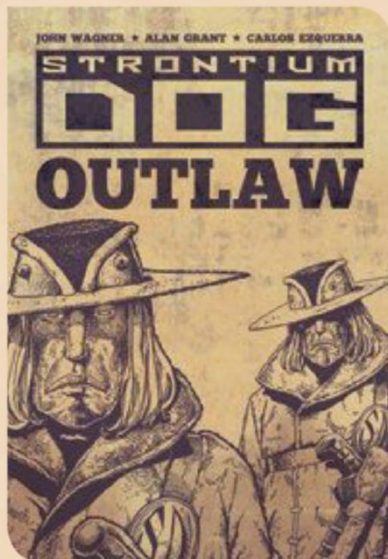
Overall, Out of Time Two is a nice showcase for two up and coming talents on the indie comics scene. Out of Time One got itself nominated for awards, and we've no doubt that this sequel will also get similar acclaim.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★ 7







### STRONTIUM DOG: OUTLAW

WRITER: JOHN WAGNER / ARTIST: CARLOS EZQUERRA / PUBLISHER: 2000 AD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Strontium Dog is one of those precious early 2000 AD creations, alongside characters such as Judge Dredd, Slaine and the ABC Warriors, that remain as iconic today as at their inception in the late 1970s.

In the near-ish future, mutants are cast out and put to work as Search and Destroy agents (bounty hunters to you and

us); foremost amongst them is the X-ray eyesight-empowered hitman Johnny Alpha. He is a super-cool combination of sci-fi and Wild West bounty hunter, backed up by an equally cool hammer-wielding Viking sidekick, Wulf Sternhammer.

Outlaw is a 23-part story originally published in 1984. This reviewer first encountered it in a two-part compilation as a 14-year-old. It blew him away then and, on re-reading it in his early forties, it blew him away all over again.

Long story short: Alpha is framed by the brilliantly sinister Stix Brothers for a cold-blooded mass shooting. With a bounty on his head, Alpha (and Sternhammer) are forced to flee the Search/Destroy Agency (the Doghouse) which they, and all other mutants, call home. But, with a bounty on his head, all of the other mutants are soon on Alpha's trail, looking to collect that bounty.

The trail of carnage as they make their escape goes from the Doghouse to the rainforests of Antarctica, to a distant Scottish-accented space colony and all the way back to the Doghouse again. Along the way, Alpha collects allies in the misshapen forms of characters such as Vic Scampi, Evans the Fist, The Torso From Newcastle and long-standing fan favourite Middenface McNulty. The story is sympathetic to its lightly but effectively drawn characters, even while maintaining a sense of the grit and cynicism of a Spaghetti Western and a sly sense of humour (with loads of blink and you miss them puns and one-liners).

Strontium Dog works well as little

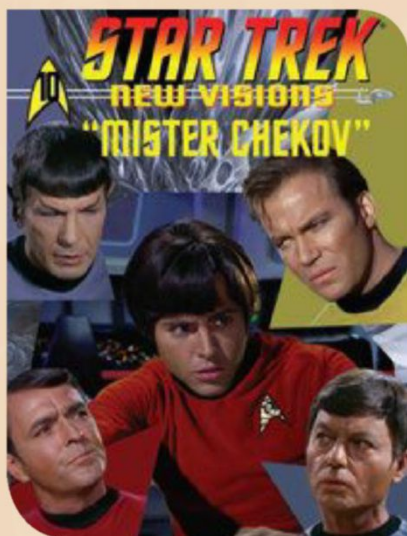
Spaghetti Western-y one-offs but here, in long form, it becomes something else. Each issue is packed with action and cliffhanger endings but also glimpses at the wider world, expanding the reader's sense of the Strontium Dog universe. The unfolding plot hints at the Mutant War, fought between mutant-kind and the evil Nelson Bunker Kreelman – Johnny Alpha's own father.

Carlos Ezquerra's black and white art is packed with detail, and is well worth lingering over, but also lends fantastic pace to the storytelling as action flits cinematically from panel to panel.

This edition features original 2000 AD Prog covers and even a Strontium Dog quiz. These are pretty minor additions that neither add to nor detract from the fact that this story, on its own, is a bona fide classic. Buy it.

SPLEENY DOTSON

★★★★★★★★★★10



### STAR TREK: NEW VISIONS #10 - MISTER CHEKOV

WRITER: JOHN BYRNE / PUBLISHER: IDW PUBLISHING / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Everybody loves Chekov, don't they? Chekov is the loveable underdog of a helmsman and navigator that all true Trekkies would like to mother. So what better idea for a comic could there be than one showing how he first got his shot at the helm of the Enterprise, right? Right?! Er.....

There is definitely something of a labour

of love about New World photo novels, each and every frame of which is constructed out of images from stills from the original Star Trek series (sometimes bolstered with a little tastefully applied CGI).

Penned by John Byrne, who has a fair list of comic credits to his name, you would expect a pretty solid story. However, what you get is not only a little bit flimsy, even as far as origin stories go, but feels so constrained by the photo novel medium, telling a story that can only be reconstructed from scenes we've seen before, that it feels as rigid and plywood as the original sets.

Perhaps the form only flags up flaws in the nature of the script, but it is certainly true that the story is contained within the Enterprise itself, and only a handful of spaces within the starship come to that. During the story, we see Chekov make the long, difficult journey from work detail in the engine rooms to the helm on the bridge. A journey that can be conducted by a short lift ride.

There are some interesting(ish) ideas taken from physics to underpin the plot but the characters' interactions are essentially 'fight' or 'run away', and the response from the crew is all about rising and falling energy levels and that "the circuits cannae take it, cap'n". Classic Star Trek, perhaps, but all pretty plywood.

The photo novel format also throws up some pretty lame images of characters we know and love, who look slightly drunk, or wonky or squinty, or even floating like a character in a '90s third person shooter,

depending on the still they've been photoshopped out of or into.

The upside, however, is that your subconscious can't help but fill in dramatic music, red alert and explosion sound effects, and even rocking motion visuals, to the panels that you're reading. A couple of times, this reviewer found himself reacting to 'shrrrooom' sound effects as an unwanted intrusion because, based on the effect shown on the screen, he had already created the authentic mid-60s sound effect in his head.

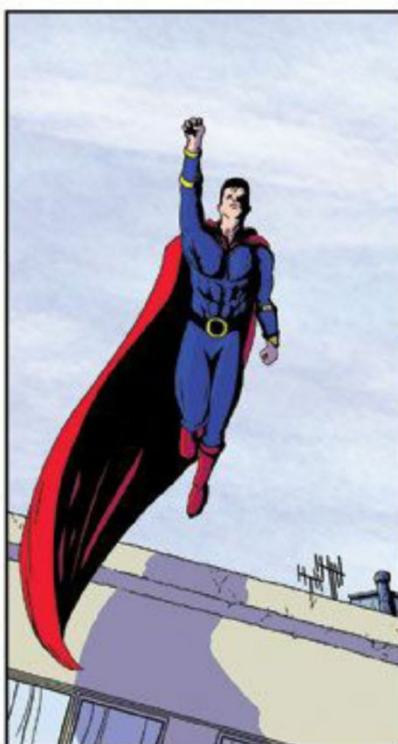
Maybe a labour of love, but pretty hard to love. Sorry.

SPLEENY DOTSON

★★★★★★★★★★3











## Details Emerge for Returns of NARUTO, HUNTER X HUNTER and more

Shonen Jump certainly has an all-star April planned. Not only will **Hunter x Hunter** be back on April 18th, but **Yu-Gi-Oh!**'s grand homecoming after twelve years will take place across April 11th and 18th. **Naruto**'s side story one-shot will run on April 25th, a couple of weeks ahead of **Boruto**, which begins on May 9th. And meanwhile, a certain tentacled teacher and ex-God of Death is slinking in too. That's right, **Assassination Classroom** isn't done yet. Koro-sensei will be giving us a peek into his private life in four chapters leading up to Jump's 21st/22nd double issue on April 25th.

## HAIKYŪ!! Anime Set for Third Seasons

Well, set us up for a spike, because we have some ace news; the third season of **Haikyū!!** has been slated for this fall. Being wary of spoilers, the new series will begin with a key match for Karasuno High, so as the days begin to darken, we'll catch you back on the court.

## New FAIRY TAIL Anime Project in the Works

With news of his next **Fairy Tail** anime fresh off the press, creator Hiro Mashima took to Twitter to tell fans that 'the project, led by myself, for a new series has already begun'. It shouldn't be much longer before we catch wind of the details, but all we can do now is take Mashima-san's advice, 'hold tight' and wait patiently for more news to surface.

## THE BOY AND THE BEAST's Producer Confirms Mamoru Hosoda is Already Working on New Film

At the end of an event on March 6th marking Japan's home release of **The Boy and the Beast** (**Bakemono no Ko**), Studio Chizu's producer Yuichiro Saito reflected on how Hosoda's new film will be a progression from his last. "Because there was **Ookami Kodomo no Ame to Yuki** (**Wolf Children**), **Bakemono no Ko** was able to be born," he said. "So I think his next story will be filled with new challenges, which can be made because of **Bakemono no Ko**."

## Tokyo Anime Award Festival Announces Anime of the Year Prize Winners

At the Tokyo Anime Award Festival ceremony held on March 21st, its winners of 2015 for the movie and TV categories were announced. **Love Live! The School Idol Movie** brought home the prize for film, rising above **The Anthem of the Heart** and Mamoru Hosoda's **The Boy and the Beast**. And as for the series award, **Shirobako** hoisted the trophy, taking out the competition including **One Punch Man** and **Osomatsu-san**.

## GINTAMA's Final Manga Arc Begins This Year

Hideaki Sorachi left a note for the readers of his 63rd **Gintama** volume that the manga's conclusion is looming, after the end of the anime's most recent run in March. To quell the worries of his fans when he announced the final arc, he said he was unsure whether the manga itself will end this year or next. While we're sad to hear the end is near, we doubt this is the last we'll see of our futuristic samurai friends.

## Young Ace Magazine Announces ERASED Manga Side Story

Kei Sanbe's heartbreaking, wistful time travel manga which inspired the hit anime **ERASED** is getting its own spin-off in Kadokawa's Young Ace magazine. The new series based on the **Boku dake ga Inai Machi** manga, which ended on March 4th, is once again written by Sanbe and roughly titled **Boku dake ga Inai Machi Gaiden** (Side Story). It will begin in Young Ace's July issue on June 4th.

## Fate's Anime Universe Gets New SHAFT-animated Series and HEAVEN'S FEEL Movie Trilogy

Monogatari's studio SHAFT confirmed their return to Marvelous' **Fate/stay night** RPG spin-off with the **Fate/Extra - Last Encore** anime, slated for a 2017 release with Kinoko Nasu returning as scriptwriter. As if in the same breath, ufotable presented their plans to adapt the **Fate/stay** visual novel's **Heaven's Feel** route as a trilogy of anime movies, directed by Unlimited Blade Works' animation director Tomonori Sudou, and also set for a 2017 release.





# COSPLAY CATWALK

A MONTHLY  
FOCUS ON  
THE COSTUMED  
ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT  
FAN CONVENTIONS  
AROUND THE WORLD

Photo: in2thereview.com



**THE TERMINATOR COSPLAY** - We profile another familiar face on the UK cosplay scene - this month, Lee Burling, who dresses as the hulking face from the future...

## STARBURST: How long have you been cosplaying?

Lee Burling: I guess officially since March 2015, when we attended the London Super Comic Con at Excel in London. That was first time I attended a convention in cosplay, but I guess it's has been part of my life for many years without really realising. My fiancé and I have always enjoyed fancy dress parties and have always tried to produce costumes that have been accurate and technically correct as possible.

We went to the MCM Comic con at the end of 2014 as 'normal' people and were blown away by the amazing work that we saw from so many cosplayers. I guess we had found our next fancy dress party and I needed to enjoy the convention cosplay experience. The *Terminator* cosplay was born the day after MCM Comic Con. Charley accompanied me as Sarah Connor from T2 and it was a superb, technically accurate cosplay. The two of us together

really blew people away. It took us about 45 minutes to get from the car park to the entrance due to the amount of photo requests. Her next cosplay was the TX terminator from *T3 Rise of the Machines*. Way better than my costume by far!

## Why did you choose The Terminator?

I chose The Terminator because I have always been a fan of the film and Arnold has always been one of my favourite actors. **Predator, The Terminator, Judgement Day, and Total Recall** are some of my all-time top films. I have a similar build to Arnold but unfortunately not the physique, so a character that is fully clothed is one of the reasons! I have been a fan of making prosthetics and make-up, so a battle damaged Terminator is a great project to get busy with the latex. It's been a great project to learn new ways of applying latex and airbrush paints to get some great effects. The gasps and making people jump when I walk around the conventions means

that I must have got something right. The Terminator is such an iconic character that projects such amazing presence by doing very little so it's perfect for a cosplay. The props that he carries and uses are also amazing for the conventions and it's great to see someone's face light up when they ask for a picture and I give them the mini gun to hold.

I am able to hide behind my dark glasses and make-up and watch the faces of people as they see me. It's pretty cool when they recognise the character straight away.

## How long do you spend making the costume?

It's difficult to say really. I will sometimes work for four to five hours one night and do that three or four nights in a row, but then have a few weeks where normal life gets in the way so I have to grab an hour here and there.

There is so much detail to work on. The face and head damage is not a



Photo: in2thereview.com



perfect resemblance, but I need to do enough to convince those who saw the films many years ago. The wounds look pretty realistic and the secret has been to give them depth. It really looks like I have a silver skull under the skin. The face prosthetics take around four hours each, and there are six in all. The sunglasses with the red LED light took around five hours to make, but it's on its third version now because the LED wasn't bright enough, so I replaced it. Then the battery box needed to be upgraded, etc.

The mini gun took me two days to make and I would say that was around four hours each day. This is without the time spent going to and from the various shops for PVC pipes, a cheap cordless drill, MDF, and hot glue sticks, etc. It's made from PVC soil pipe, lengths of conduit, MDF, and a couple of Chinese takeaway Tupperware containers. It's also made with lots of hot glue. Cosplay involves a lot of hot glue!

The cosplay is evolving all the time. I find new techniques for forming the latex moulds and painting the wounds. The

mini gun is now a second version as I added new ideas to a brand new build. The glasses are brighter, the head wounds are deeper and more realistic. It's something you can sit and work on when there is very little on TV.

The glasses were a real find. Originally, I went with a pair of Ray Ban Wayfarers; they really weren't correct but did the job on the day. The original *Terminator 2* sunglasses are a very rare Italian Brand that retail for around £800 a pair. I spent good money on producing a good cosplay but there are limits. I spent a month in the USA in January 2015 doing additional training on helicopters and became obsessed with looking in every single shop that sells sunglasses in the hope that there might be a copy or similar pair of glasses. Many racks in Walmart, Best Buy, Macey's - the list goes on with no success. We went to the Kennedy Space Centre for a day out and in the gift shop, I spotted yet another sunglass stand and had to go and check. Cue the choir singing and light from the sky because there they were! As good a match as could be



Photo: in2thereview.com





and the only pair! Mine for a cool \$14.99. Accuracy is something you need to travel the world to find.

The grenades are made from hardwood. Turned on a lathe and painted. They look real until you pick them up. The grenade bandolier was a length of black webbing bought for 50p. The bullets were a good find from a fancy dress shop. Pretty realistic and cheap. The boots are the same brand as the originals, but not the same style. Again, not going to break the bank as the originals are \$500. They were an eBay find for £60. Rare as hen's teeth but part of the 'build' is the hours of research and finding the things needed.

The Jacket was another eBay find. You have to know what you are looking for and also know that you will rarely find the exact piece, but close can be adjusted and added to with a sewing machine and scalpel.

I guess the single most expensive item is the grenade launcher. It's a perfect replica airsoft gun that doesn't fire. It opens and closes the same as the real one and completes the cosplay perfectly. Again, it was very hard to find, but a must as it's very hard to make one. I am trying to make one from foam but it's not going very well.

I would like to thank Dom at Shinigami photography and Pete at Intothereview for the amazing photos they have taken and shared with me. They set up at the conventions and give their time to capture some really great and creative shots. They even did post-production on some of the shots to give an even better creation.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

Check out Lee's Facebook page - **The Terminator Cosplay** - where you can find pictures of his builds and ask questions about making props and prosthetics. There are also tutorials on YouTube on the **Heliboy999** channel, and under the same name on Instagram.

## READER'S COSPLAY "BEHIND GLASS FILMS"



We catch up with another talented cosplayer on the scene...

**STARBURST: How long have you been cosplaying?**

Behind Glass Films: I've been cosplaying since 2011, but had a break for a couple of years. I would say I've been seriously cosplaying from 2014 onwards. I attended my first Con in 2011, which was the London MCM Comic Con. I was dressed as L from **Death Note**. I started out doing crossplay first, as I seem to be able to cosplay male characters quite easily, although I enjoy cosplaying both genders.

**Do you have a favourite character to dress as?**

I would have to say Howl from **Howl's Moving Castle** the most, as his cloak makes me feel powerful and magical in a silly kind of way. Hatsune Miku is also another favourite, as she has so many different outfits and styles to work from. I'm looking forward to cosplaying a character called Amira from an anime **Rage of Bahamut: Genesis**, which I have already done a small shoot for. I am working on her Demon Armour which will be the biggest cosplay I have made so far. Demons or Elves are always near the top of my list.

**How long do you spend making your costumes?**

The time it takes to make my costumes vary, if I have made it from scratch myself like an armour set I am working on at the moment, it can take me up to a year to finish. My previous cosplays have taken me a few months to make. Usually, I collect different materials or other clothing and customise it depending on the look I want. I hope to have my first full armour set finished by the end of 2016.

I mostly take my cosplay photos myself, although some of my friends and family have taken them for me. My close friend Paige, who cosplays Luka Megurine in one of my Miku (Vocaloid) photo shoots, is sometimes my photographer. She is very talented and we have a great time planning our shoots together!

MARTIN UNSWORTH

Find out more about Behind Glass Films at [facebook.com/BehindGlassFilms](https://www.facebook.com/BehindGlassFilms).



Credit: Asja Dally



Credit: Asja Dally

**Are you a cosplayer and want to see your work featured in STARBURST?**

Drop us an email at [cosplay@starburstmagazine.com](mailto:cosplay@starburstmagazine.com) and we'll print our favourites every month



NEWS AND PREVIEWS  
IN GAMING  
BY LEE PRICE

# PIXEL JUICE



## FINAL FANTASY XV Release Date Confirmed

With all of the hype that surrounds the upcoming **Final Fantasy VII** remake, it can be easy to forget that Square Enix is also gearing up for the launch of the fifteenth game in the series as well. The company announced during a special event held in Los Angeles last month that the game would be released worldwide on September 30th, 2016.

Better yet, those who can't get enough **Final Fantasy** goodness will be happy to hear that the game will be part of a larger series of projects that the company says will make up the **Final Fantasy XV** universe. A CG movie and anime based around the game will also be released. We imagine this will be supplemented with further sequels if the game turns out to be popular.

## NX Controller Pics Leaked... Then Debunked

In mid-March, a bunch of pictures of what was purported to be the control pad for Nintendo's upcoming NX were released. They looked horrendous.

Ridiculously shiny, ergonomically unsound and with buttons that aren't actually buttons, the pad looked like something that no self-respecting gamer would want in their hands.

Thankfully, it seems that the images ended up being fakes but, worryingly, they are apparently based on the patents that Nintendo have applied for in relation to the pad. Hopefully, what they actually come out with won't be anything like the utter abominations those 'leaked' images hinted at. Can you imagine a pad with no actual buttons and weird, nubby analogue sticks going over well? Fingers crossed, the actual end product will be much better.

## COMING SOON



## CARMAGEDDON: MAX DAMAGE

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC  
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 3RD

*Normally, we don't really feature racing games here in the humble pages of STARBURST, but then Carmageddon could never be described as being normal. The game, which was released in the late 1990s, saw the player racing against a group of other people in souped-up metal machines, with the kicker being that you could decimate any pedestrians or livestock that happened to get in your way in a shower of bloody goodness. Look for Max Damage to offer much of the same high voltage, yet extremely politically incorrect fun.*

## COMING SOON



## LEGO STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

PLATFORM: MULTI

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 28TH

*It may have taken them a little while this time, but Warner Bros has once again jumped on a major movie property bandwagon with a LEGO game. We know what to expect from these by now – simplistic yet fun gameplay that pokes fun at the story of the film. If you like LEGO games and Star Wars then you already know you're going to be purchasing this. Anybody who is on the fence may want to consider the level of their fandom to either property before parting with any of their cash.*

## No Love Lost Between Hayter and Kojima

David Hayter, who **Metal Gear Solid** fans will recognise as the better voice for Solid Snake than Kiefer Sutherland, has revealed that there is no love lost between he and Hideo Kojima. In fact, he claims that the lead designer of the series had been looking to oust him for a long time before he finally got the job done with **Metal Gear Solid V**.

At a recent Game Informer show, he stated: "I've got no particular love for Kojima," before going on to inform people that Kojima had been looking to replace him since attempting to bring Kurt Russell to voice Snake for **Metal Gear Solid 3**. Furthermore, the man who is still the voice of Solid Snake for so many fans claimed that he couldn't bring himself to play **Metal Gear Solid V** because he would feel humiliated by the experience. You have to feel for the guy.

He also claimed that it was very unlikely that he would work on any Kojima projects again, though that does mean that there is still a chance we will see him back in the **Metal Gear** fold given as how the series is no longer a Kojima project.





## UNCHARTED 4 to be Massive

The team behind **Uncharted 4** has come out and claimed that the new game will contain much more for gamers to explore than any of the previous games in the series, giving fans something of a teaser of what to expect from the game when it is finally released.

Speaking during a 'Making Of' video for the game, Technical Art Director Teagan Morrison claimed: "We have bigger levels than we've ever had before. Maybe ten times the size, at least, of explorable space."

Audio Lead Phil Kovats added: "With larger worlds comes larger possibilities and larger possibilities usually means more detail. In fact, that's one of the things that we're really shooting for in this game is a higher level of detail on the PlayStation 4 and the experience for our gamers."

Sounds exciting. Here's hoping we actually see it all in action at some point this year.

## COMING SOON



## KIRBY: PLANET ROBOT

PLATFORM: 3DS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 10TH

The Wii U may be pretty much dead in the water, but the 3DS is still enjoying a fairly steady supply of quality titles. **Robobot** is set to be another platforming adventure for everybody's favourite testicle with a face, this time offering the player to switch between multiple 2D planes to conduct their adventuring. Kirby's ability to absorb the powers of his enemies also makes a return, with the game apparently boasting 25 possible transformations. Of course, the release will also coincide with the unveiling of another group of Amiibos based around the game.

## COMING SOON



## GRAND KINGDOM

PLATFORM: VITA, PS4

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 17TH

Released in its native Japan back in November of 2015, **Grand Kingdom** is an excellent tactical-RPG, the likes of which you might not have expected to see get a release in PAL territories without any sort of major backing from a large publisher. Still, it is on its way and is well worth checking out if you're a fan of pure tactical-RPGs. Set in a fantasy world where four factions are fighting for domination, your task is to fight your way to the top making use of a range of mercenaries. There is also an online component so you can test your skills against fellow players.

## What The Hell is PlayStation 4.5?

Reports began surfacing towards the end of March that Sony is looking into creating a more powerful version of the PlayStation 4, which some believe will launch prior to the release of PlayStation VR in October 2016.

People who are close to the situation provided the information and claimed: "The new console would be announced before the planned October release of the PlayStation VR, Sony's new virtual-reality headset. It would be able to handle ultra-high-definition resolution graphics. The upgraded console would also provide more power for running the PlayStation VR, whose main competitors, Facebook Inc.'s Oculus Rift and HTC Corp.'s Vive, are designed to work with top-shelf computers."

Most worryingly for gamers is that there are also claims that new PS4 games will run in a more optimised format on the PS4.5, which may lead to some feeling they have to upgrade their hardware after only a couple of years. If Sony end up creating AAA exclusive titles for an updated version of their existing hardware just to push their VR concept, Microsoft may just have found their way back to the lead position in the console wars.

## PlayStation VR Release Month and Price Announced

Sony has finally announced when they will be unleashing their latest boondoggle on the world, stating that the PlayStation VR will be with us in October 2016 at the low, low price of \$399, otherwise known as more than the cost of a PS4.

Of course, the UK market can likely expect to see that converted to £399, exchange rate be damned, but is there any reason to actually invest in the device? Some nifty videos showing trendy people getting wowed by a whole lot of nothing while wearing apparatus on their faces has been released and Sony is claiming they will have fifty games available for launch and 260 developers on-board.

That sounds like an awful lot of developers working on content. We wonder just how much of that is going to be gimmicky shovelware?

There's just something about this that screams 'gimmick' to us. While there may be a few decent experiences to be had, the Wii has already shown us that straying too far from the traditional console format can only offer short-term success, and that had a lower entry price.

It will certainly be interesting to see how the PlayStation VR will do, so let's hope it doesn't result in Sony going off the deep end after building so much of their reputation back over the last decade.





## THE DIVISION Breaks Ubisoft Sales Records

Considering the fact that Ubisoft is the publisher of popular gaming series like **Assassin's Creed** and **Far Cry**, it is somewhat refreshing to see that a completely new IP has managed to break company sales records.

**The Division** has become the company's fastest-selling game of all time, which probably signals the start of Ubisoft making a series out of it and then hammering it into the ground.

Yves Guillemot, co-founder and CEO of Ubisoft, commented: "*The launch of **The Division** is a tremendous achievement for Ubisoft, and demonstrates our unrivalled capacity to create fantastic new game brands and transform them into entertainment blockbusters. This is a momentous day for Ubisoft, but more importantly it marks the start of millions of players' enduring engagement in **The Division's** game world, which we are confident they will love.*" We're not so sure... (see our review on page 117).

## SCRIBBLENAUTS Developer Hit with Layoffs

It is always a sad time when a videogames developer is forced to cut back on staff, particularly in cases where the developer is responsible for some truly innovative gaming experiences. Unfortunately, 5th Cell, who created the superb **Scribblenauts** series, is dealing with that exact issue.

Following the cancellation of **Scribblenauts: Fighting Words** on mobile devices by publisher Warner Bros, the studio apparently laid off more than 45 staff members. There were rumours that the company had folded completely, but apparently that doesn't seem the case according to a statement that was released by CEO Jeremiah Slaczka. Thankfully, it looks like the remaining team are helping those who were affected find work with other companies, if the statement is to be believed.

Here's hoping 5Th Cell recovers and continues to bring us some awesome gaming experiences.

## COMING SOON



## GUILTY GEAR XRD REVELATOR

PLATFORM: PS3, PS4

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 10TH

*Odd titling habits aside, the **Guilty Gear** series has always been excellent for fighting fun if you are looking to explore a little deeper than stalwarts like **Street Fighter** and **Tekken**. **Revelator** is the follow-up to **Guilty Gear Xrd** and offers a bit more plot and a few new characters for those who just can't get enough of **Guilty Gear's** silky-smooth fighting mechanics. Expect beautiful 2D graphics and frantic fighting goodness that should prove perfect for those who may not have much interest in **Street Fighter V**.*

## COMING SOON



## FAIRY FENCER F: ADVENT DARK FORCE

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 24TH

*Sony has really made the PS4 the home of interesting curios from Japan in recent years, marking yet another way that the company has managed to set itself apart from Microsoft. **Advent Dark Force** is an updated re-release of the original **Fairy Fencer F** that was released back in 2013. With an enormous cast of characters and some compositions from Nobuo Uematsu thrown into the mix, this doesn't offer anything particularly ground-breaking, but should be a nice addition to the collection for any JRPG fans.*

## POKÉMON Designer Killed During Windstorm

In truly tragic news, **Pokémon** designer and artist Eric Medalle was killed in Seattle in March after a tree collapsed onto his car during a windstorm. He was driving with one of his children when the collision happened. Thankfully, his child escaped with only minor injuries.

The 42-year-old is survived by his wife and two daughters. The team at STARBURST sends their deepest condolences.

## Sony Sends Out Compensation for PSN Issues

Sony's PSN suffered a breach way back in 2011 that caused gamers to collectively lose their minds, understandably so given that millions of users' data was potentially compromised.

As of March, the company has finally gotten around to handing out the compensation that they promised. Granted, said compensation is a couple of free games, but it's still something. Gamers who complained were actually able to select from a list of games as early as January 2015, but it has taken the company a further year to follow through. We can't imagine a couple of cut-price games is really going to cut it, but there you go.



# REVIEWS

THE LATEST  
GAMING RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



## FALLOUT 4: AUTOMATRON DLC

DEVELOPER: BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS / PUBLISHER: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS / PLATFORM: PC, XBOX ONE, PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

There's always one question which surrounds each Fallout/Elder Scrolls DLC release: Will it be a Knights of the Nine or another Shivering Isles? Even all these years on, the stark contrast between those two Oblivion expansions seems to define player expectations, fitting either into a lacklustre new release or a sprawling new storyline. This has been true throughout Fallout 3, New Vegas and Skyrim, but Automatron seems to be the rare exception. While it's hardly about to set the world on fire, it offers more substantial gains than just a new, shiny gun or two.

The story here follows the inclusion of new, killer robots to the Commonwealth wasteland. Unlike the leftover automatons from the military or odd household, these are newly built monstrosities, cobbled together from leftover spare parts but nevertheless surprisingly deadly. Headed by the mysterious Mechanist, your task now is to help the traders they besiege and end this threat for good.

Let's focus on the obvious first: yes, this is one big rehash of an old Fallout 3 quest, The Superhuman Gambit. You're taking on someone who has let a few comic books get to their head and has donned

an old superhero costume in an ill-advised attempt to do good. While lacking a woman backed by a horde of giant ant minions, much of it ultimately plays out the same way you would expect, note for note. This is a continuation of a big problem Fallout 4 suffered from, where it merely repeats Fallout 3's past successes, and recycles anything it can for a new generation. It results in a sadly insubstantial quest, and would have damned this latest release were it not for its new mechanics.

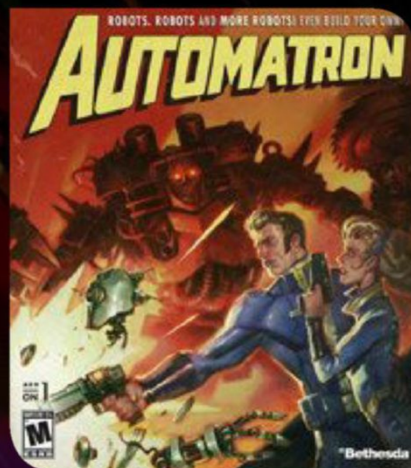
It's clear at first glance that just about all the effort went into the new killbot options, from the new foes to the ability to build your own man-sized tanks. Reworking and restructuring older builds, you're given the opportunity to create hybrid designs, mashing together the best elements of both worlds. Forget the settlements, playing hours of "Pimp my Codsworth" will become your new time-sink in Fallout, and the sheer variety of combinations on offer means there's no end to what you can assemble. Really, so long as you have the parts for them, you can quite happily have several nuke-lobbing hybrids defending your personal castle. The fact this extends to your more robotic companions, with some very helpful unique upgrades, also means

you might find yourself switching favourites for the first time since the game's release.

If you're invested in big killer robots over story, give this one a look, but don't expect a truly revolutionary release.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★ 7







## DYING LIGHT: THE FOLLOWING

DEVELOPER: TECHLAND / PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Hey, you know what would have made the Dead Rising games better? A first person perspective, John Carpenter-esque soundtrack and heavy emphasis on parkour. Such, presumably, were the thought processes behind Dying Light, a first person zombie brawler with a John Carpenter-esque soundtrack and a heavy emphasis on parkour. You know what would have made that even better, though? Off-road buggies!

And that indeed is the main addition to Dying Light's 'enhanced' edition,

The Following, which sets bouncy Kyle Crane loose in an all-new environment and gives him a fancy new toy to play with; a customisable buggy to traverse the all-new, expansive Countryside. Outside of the big city (bye, Harran) it's harder to give those tricky zombie virals the slip – vast plains of flat land hardly being the most conducive for kick-ass parkour battles – so you'll need your car to speed out of trouble when the dead get too overwhelming (or annoying). In terms of entertainment

value, running zombies over with your car is the new dropkicking them off rooftops.

More than just a handful of new missions or a hitherto unseen bit of the city, then. The Following is a rare add-on that adds a whole new mechanic to the proceedings, feeling like a proper extension of the game rather than just a lazy epilogue to the main story. That story, by the way, has Crane sent out to The Countryside to investigate the possibility of a cure for the zombie virus which plagues his world. There's more to this sunny new locale than meets the eye though (even more than the zombies) and the locals aren't too happy with Crane poking about in their business either, regarding him with The Wicker Man-style aloofness and sinister glares. And so, to gain their trust, you'll set out as their general dogbody, upgrading yourself and your vehicle as you go.

Like your weapons, the buggy has a habit of falling apart all the time, so you'll be constantly working on and improving it; it starts off as a heap of junk but soon becomes an invaluable bit of kit, and one you'll take pride in driving about in. It's integrated into the game far better than Batman's batmobile, too, so put away

those fears of forced driving sections and pain in the ass upside-down races. In fact, it breathes new life into the formula, making it as much fun to play and explore as the previous game.

Like Dying Light, however, there is a lot of grinding required to progress in the story. As before, it's a little bit tedious going at the same thing over and over again, just to raise your XP, and especially in the occasionally unengaging side missions. Scavenging too, remains a nightmare, like a version of Fallout 4 where the only things you'll ever find are string, metal scraps and alcohol. Still, it's addictive stuff, and those who enjoyed Dying Light should similarly adore this one.

For those who've yet to discover Dying Light, The Enhanced Edition is a good shout, including the main game, The Following and DLC The Bozack Horde for your zombie-massacring pleasure. Those who have played Dying Light, meanwhile, would do well to pick up The Following, which puts more effort in here than most do into full-on, proper sequels.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★★★★ 7



## TOM CLANCY'S THE DIVISION

DEVELOPER: MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PUBLISHER: UBISOFT / PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Whether you're looking at his literature or the video games he helped inspire, having the late Tom Clancy's name on a product is supposed to be a seal of quality. There's supposed to be a sense of prestige to it, the idea that it has met some high set of standards to be deemed worthy of bearing the name of the man who helped bring about Rainbow Six. Yet after twenty hours of

playing The Division, you'd be forgiven for wondering just what it did right in order to earn that stamp of approval.

Let's get the obvious issues out of the way first of all: yes, the graphics have been radically downgraded from the promotional material. Yes, Uplay has once again been tacked onto this game, causing no end of server crashes and horror stories

of players being locked out of their new purchase. Yes, the story is extremely sub-par, and is little more than a half-forgotten concession to those who enjoyed the sprawling storylines of prior Clancy games. These are the big problems cited time and time again, but even if you were to stomach those flaws, you're left with a bargain bin title any half competent developer could have squirted out in six months.

Within just a few hours, you'll soon find yourself repeating the same mission types over and over again. While Ubisoft attempts to disguise this with slightly varying objectives or different names, each one can be boiled down to entering a building, killing everyone, murdering the one important guy with a name, and then grabbing some goods. No matter the role, whether it's retrieving an objective or rescuing hostages, this is how things will always play out, and you'll be sick to death of it in no time at all. Worse still, not only

are the objectives bland but the enemy AI is utterly brain-dead, and they only manage to remain a threat thanks to some extremely bullet-spongy builds.

Even if you're somehow willing to stomach all of that, or skip nearly all of the content The Division offers in favour of the Dark Zone PVP system, you'll be met with an environment which favours equipment over skill. It doesn't matter how quick you are on the trigger, the guy with the bigger gun will always win.

This is ultimately a game that is bland at best. While it avoids committing some of the most egregious AAA sins of recent years, there's no reward at the end for grinding you way through wave upon wave of mooks and it offers only a shallow, repetitive experience. Stick to Destiny for your MMOFPS fix, folks, as there's no fun to be found in here.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 3





## BLUES AND BULLETS: EPISODE 2

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: A CROWD OF MONSTERS / PLATFORM: PC, PS4, MAC, LINUX, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW (PC) TBC (PS4, XBOX ONE)

After a notable absence, *Blues and Bullets* returns to PCs once again, picking up where the cliffhanger left off. Moving undercover, in his efforts to bring Sofia Capone's kidnappers to justice, retired detective Eliot Ness begins to realise that there is far more at work than a simple abduction. Human trafficking has been working its way through San Esperanza for years, and he soon witnesses first-hand what kind of monsters have been buying up children by the dozen from them.

Playing out like *Sin City* were it envisioned by Mike Mignola, there's a near perfect balance of noir tropes, supernatural

elements and character pieces present in the story. This time it delves deeper into Ness' personal history, from his flaws to decisions while working to take down Capone. We see how he has witnessed San Esperanza slide deeper into the gutter, and flashbacks are used to emphasise that hard life. These are interwoven with the present day to help spotlight the character's personal demons and offer a few meaningful choices.

Rather than directly mimicking Telltale's approach, A Crowd of Monsters offers decisions that matter to the protagonist himself. They speak more of how he has led his life,

whether he took the good or bad cop routine, even offering the player chances to truly be the man the public thinks he is or a hypocrite when given an opportunity for revenge. These offer more opportunities to really role-play a man within the story, rather than simply make the odd arbitrary decision here and there.

However, this is quite the flawed episode, despite its strengths. Sadly, it's notably rougher around the edges when compared with its processor. Along with a frustratingly uneven frame-rate and a few dodgy textures, it rushes to re-introduce many of its core elements. Having kept their audience waiting for nine months, it seems A Crowd of Monsters wanted to front load this episode with a show reel of its core mechanics, rather than allowing them to be

more evenly distributed across the story. This results in a furious gun battle abruptly jack-knifing into a crime scene investigation, and some odd tonal shifts.

What's more, the episode itself is heavily reliant upon its gunplay this time and introduces two lengthy battles, the latter of which more than outstays its welcome.

It's a disappointing release after the nine-month wait, but hardly a bad one. *Blues and Bullets* still shows promise; the answers on offer allude to a deeper, more complex plot to come and there's enough good here to still outweigh the bad. Let's just hope Episode 3 opts to focus more on that over another turret section.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★ 6



## RISK: GAME OF THRONES SKIRMISH EDITION

PUBLISHER: HBO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Risk sits in an odd place in the world of board games. Apart from chess, it is perhaps the most well known wargame out there and it's certainly a household name. Since its debut in 1959, this simple game of world domination has gone through a great many changes and variations. It's to the credit of the game's

simplicity that it can be altered and changed so easily.

For those who haven't had the pleasure; Risk is a map-based strategy game. Put simply, you stack up units in regions on the map, slowly building strength and territory over time. The more territory you have, the more units you gain. You gain territory by

invading your opponent's territory, and conflicts are resolved by both sides rolling dice, matching up the results and deducting units as appropriate, until one side has no units left. The Skirmish version of Risk is even simpler, with players duking it out until a card telling you to stop playing is drawn, or until all but one nation on the board is destroyed.

The violent conflicts in Game of Thrones seem an obvious fit for a wargame like Risk, though it's worth remembering that this is Risk first and Game of Thrones second. This version comes with some lovely pieces, robust cards and a great board with a map of Westeros.

What we essentially have here is a very, very pretty looking map on a very robust board, and a collection of playing pieces themed by the various Houses. Lannisters get Lion heads, Starks get Wolf heads and so on.

Changing the map is pretty much the most basic way to change Risk and it's all they've done with this set.

It is, however, a good map and changes the strategy just enough. As this is the skirmish set, the map has clearly been adjusted to encourage fast play and an aggressive style. If you're looking for something closer to a simulation of the books or the TV show, then there are more involved and more complex Game of Thrones-themed games on the market, but they typically take much longer to play. Risk – Game Of Thrones Skirmish Edition moves quickly for what it is. This is a fun, fast and simple to pick up wargame, and a good way to introduce non-gamers into the wonders of dice and battle.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★ 7





## EVERYTHING ABOUT GAMES

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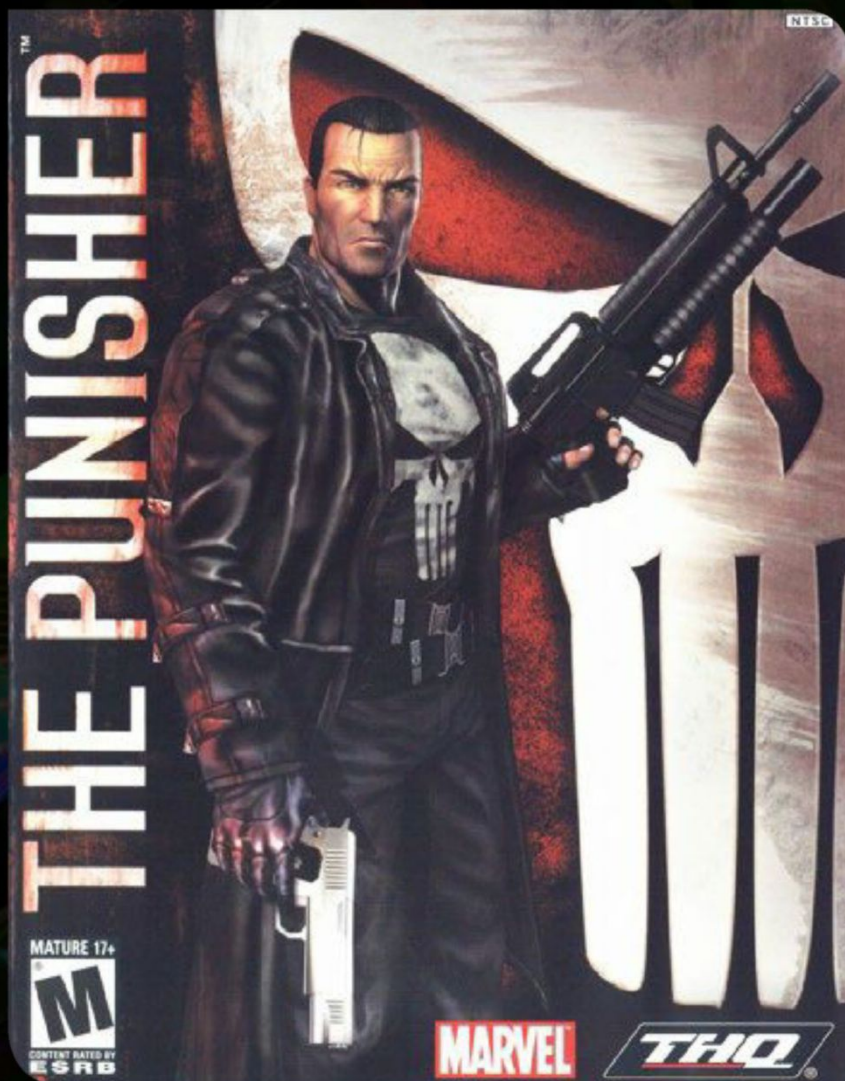


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# RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT  
THE WORLD OF  
RETRO GAMING  
BY CHRIS JACKSON



## MARVELLOUS PUNISHMENT

**The Punisher**  
(Xbox, PS2, PC, 2005)

It feels a bit strange writing about this one in a retro column, but since we live by the motto 'as long as it's over ten years old', here we go!

Partly based on the plot of the 2004 movie, combined with elements of the comic books, *The Punisher* video game does exactly what you'd expect - your job

is to track down villains and punish them! Movie Punisher Thomas Jane returns to provide his voice to the game's titular character, lending an authentic feel to proceedings (because how many people remember Dolph Lundgren in the 1989 version?), which is further reinforced by appearances from many familiar villains and dark and gritty locations from more recent iterations of the franchise.

There really isn't much to say about the gameplay, as it's all very

straightforward - all you need to do is run around the levels and maim everyone in sight! Our friendly Punisher Frank Castle can wield two guns at a time, but in all honesty, the shooting mechanic is slightly wonky and should really only be used in an emergency (such as if you're ultra-low on health and need to pick off bad guys from behind cover). Instead, you'll probably have more fun hurtling straight towards the enemies and pressing the 'quick kill' button, dishing out a gruesome instant fatality to whichever unfortunate soul is within reach. These kills are defined by whatever weapon you currently have equipped, and could involve a knife through the head, a grenade down the throat, or a flamethrower through the... yeah...

More impressive (and amusing) than these quick kills are the 'special interrogation' areas. Regular interrogations can be used at any point during the game to get information from enemies such as the location of a hidden weapons cache or to convince the bad guys to leave you alone (but beware - they don't always tell the truth!), and also double up as a useful health-replenishing mechanic. Special interrogations are much more interesting - carry an enemy to one of the coloured markers dotted around each level, and you're taken to an ultra-violent scene of torture and/or annihilation. The left thumbstick is used (rather awkwardly, unfortunately) to find a 'sweet spot', at which point your chosen foe will feel threatened enough to give you the information you're after, but scare him too much and the interrogation will fail in some of the most grisly ways imaginable. Crushed in a trash compactor? Check. Face eaten off by piranhas? Check. Knives through the eyes? Check...

It's a shame that the ratings board decided to force developers Volition (*Saint's Row*, *Red Faction*) to censor the more brutal executions, as the screen fades to black and white and zooms out to the point where the end result of the special interrogation scenes take place just slightly off-screen. It doesn't take away from the impact too much, though, as the sound design in the game is good enough to help your mind fill in the parts that your eyes can't see.

All in all, despite the shaky gun controls and repetitive gameplay, *The Punisher* can be picked up pretty cheaply these days and contains more than enough gory enjoyment to make it worth its current super-low asking price.



## Spider-Man and The X-Men in Arcade's Revenge (SNES, Mega Drive, 1992)

We thought about leaving this one for another time, seeing as there's already a whole feature on X-Men games in this month's issue [see page 34], but what's the harm with having one more, eh?

Firstly, who's Arcade? Well, he's a supervillain of the highest order, who has built his own underground lair known as Murderworld in which he plans to lure hapless superheroes to their deaths. Except he doesn't aim to outright kill his victims - Arcade's 'thing' is that he enjoys watching his captors fight for survival, setting up traps that offer a small chance of escape. He's a Marvel prototype of Jigsaw from the Saw movies, if you will. It is inside this evil subterranean Murderworld that the game is set, and believe us when we say that your chances of survival are very, very slim indeed!

The game begins with Spider-Man disarming bombs around the entrance of a building, by following his Spider-sense (an on-screen arrow points you in the right direction) and simply running over/collecting the flashing bombs. Once this fairly simple and straightforward level is out of the way, we find out that Arcade has somehow managed to kidnap Wolverine, Cyclops, Storm, and Gambit! The remainder of the game contains two levels for each character (including Spider-Man) that must be completed before the final battle against Arcade can begin.

Each character being trapped in a different part of Murderworld is a pretty good excuse for some imaginative design, with each set of levels being completely different to the others. Spider-Man's stages see you navigating (or more likely getting lost in) maze-like building exteriors, with no real aim other than getting to the end and defeating the end of level bosses (in this case, a double team of Rhino and Carnage). Cyclops is trapped underground and must contend with some pixel-perfect platforming and ridiculously evil mine cart sections filled with bombs on the tracks and spikes falling down from overhead

LICENSED BY  
**Nintendo**  
**ARCADE'S  
REVENGE**



with no warning at all...

Wolverine battles giant toys inside a fun house, before one of the most ruthless boss battles we've ever seen - relentlessly pursued by Juggernaut throughout the entire second stage, you'll need to slowly inch forwards while constantly turning round to punch him as many times as possible before he catches up with you and it's time to take a few more steps forward. Juggernaut's speed will match your own, so if you go too quickly he'll easily catch up with you and kill you in one hit. He can take an insane amount of damage, but there's only a finite amount of time to achieve victory as eventually the stage just ends with an inescapable bottomless pit. Oh, and there are also bomb-throwing clowns to contend with, as well as walls that need to be punched through. It really is an absolute nightmare. We hope Arcade got an especially good laugh out of watching us struggle with this one.

Gambit's first stage is a horizontally scrolling platforming affair which involves outrunning a gigantic spiked ball that trundles towards you right up until the end of the level. Further precision platforming is required here, and you really do need to get your skates on as the developers saw fit to include a fair few misleadingly placed platforms that you will definitely need to backtrack from, as well as some infuriating walls that need to be destroyed before passing through. Gambit does have a pretty cool weapon in the form of killer playing cards, which he uses to attack the various chess pieces that are trying to kill him (really), but ammo is incredibly limited and it's very easy to run out of cards and get completely stuck. Defeated enemies drop decks of cards which replenish your ammo when

collected, but really it probably would've been easier for Gambit to have just brought a few more packs with him in the first place. After defeating the end of level boss (a giant floating playing card) it's on to the next stage, which this time is a vertically scrolling maze sort of affair filled with even more traps and surprises than before...

Last but not least, we come to Storm, the only character whose levels take place underwater, and the only character to have an air meter instead of a standard life gauge. The object this time is to destroy valves hidden around the level in order to make the water rise to the point where Storm can make her escape at the top of the room. Your air meter runs down pretty quickly, and is also depleted when coming into contact with enemies, but it can be filled up by hovering over air ducts or swimming to the surface for a few seconds. The problem is, if you don't know where you're going, it's totally possible to open too many valves and raise the water level so high that you'll end up drowning before you can reach the safety of the surface. Further frustration and punishment! That Arcade really is a sod!

If (and we do mean 'if') you manage to complete all of these levels, all that remains is a quick reprise where each X-Man makes their way to Arcade's quarters inside Murderworld. Taking control of Spider-Man once again, the final part of the game is a fast-paced and seemingly endless battle with Arcade. Flanked by the X-Men, who will occasionally lend a hand by attacking from the sides of the screen, once Arcade has been defeated, it's time for one of the most underwhelming endings we've ever seen... Spoiler alerts shouldn't really count for a game that's almost 25 years old, but if you want to know, keep reading the final paragraph. Or if you're sadistic enough to want to try and see it for yourself, turn the page now and we'll see you next month!

OK, so at the end of the game, a single screen divided into five comic book panels tells us that Arcade has escaped, and then the X-Men all bugger off home. Seriously. We go to all that effort and the villain survives?! Possibly the most difficult game with the least rewarding payoff ever made. Absolutely loved it!





# ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE  
GUIDES YOU  
THROUGH THE  
REALM OF  
TABLETOP GAMING



Nostalgia can be a rather complex thing, especially when it comes to board games. Often it's used to sell things from an existing franchise (*Ghostbusters*, *Star Wars*, etc.) Less common is nostalgia for long out of print games that aren't coming back anytime soon.

One example is 1989's *HeroQuest*, the classic adventure game that for some were their first tentative steps into tabletop roleplaying game. *HeroQuest* was produced by US games company Milton Bradley and British collectable models firm Games Workshop.

*HeroQuest* saw players take a single character (Barbarian, Dwarf, Elf, or Wizard) into a dungeon to beat up monsters. The sculpts were in the same vein as Games Workshop's *Warhammer Fantasy Battle*, though as they were plastic playing pieces in an MB game, weren't the same sort of quality as your usual gaming miniature. One other player took the role of an evil wizard who summoned monsters to foil the players' dungeon crawling.

Basically, it was a simplified version of tabletop gaming, produced by a large games manufacturer. This meant that it was easily available at toyshops and supermarkets. It was a hit, as were the various expansions. This led to various video game and spin-off novels feeding a hungry market of nerds.

Sadly, Games Workshop and MB went their separate ways, with MB becoming part

of Hasbro. This game, a favourite of '80s and '90s nerds, isn't coming back.

Or is it? As it turns out, it sort of has. Its popularity means that it's become the go-to comparison for fantasy adventure board games such as Fantasy Flight's *Descent*, despite *Descent* being only cosmetically similar to *HeroQuest*.

Perhaps the most obvious (and most recent) spiritual successor to *HeroQuest* is Mantic Games' *Dungeon Saga*. Mantic of course, has been building a reputation for doing the things that their rivals won't. Composed mostly of ex-Games Workshop staff, Mantic has been nipping away at the heels of the Nottingham giant, mostly by producing products that improve on old (and out of print) Games Workshop ideas. For example, Mantic has a range of models called Forge Fathers for their sci-fi game *Warpath*. These are basically dwarves in space, and though they look nothing like Games Workshop's long-abandoned *Space Dwarves* range, they ring enough bells that nostalgic old soaks like me are keen to have them.

*Dungeon Saga* strips the idea of the dungeon crawl board game down to its raw components, and makes those parts both beautiful and functional. Previous games on the market (for example, the excellent *Descent* and the abysmal *Order of the Stick*) conflate complexity with superiority, and it seems that Mantic has instead decided to keep it as simple as they can. Fast, furious, and fun are very much the order of the day here.

The starter set is called *Dungeon Saga: The Dwarf King's Quest*, although as there is only one starter box and a few expansions, we'll shorten that name for now. The box itself is designed to look like some ancient and dusty tome; it's a book-shaped affair with a special design that means you can







stick the thing into an oversized bookshelf without all the bits sliding around inside. Expansions have similar packaging. Not only is this a lovely thing to look at, it's also very nifty. Previous Mantic games have had huge boxes that look ugly on the shelf, but this one doesn't tolerate that silliness in the slightest, and you can just about cram in a few extra models here and there if you have to.

The components are very nice indeed. Unlike *HeroQuest*, these models have been made to look good on their own, but look even better painted. There's a lot of fine detail here, especially on the hero and main monster characters. We also get dungeon furniture, plastic doors for heroes to smash, barrels to break, chests to plunder and so on. None of that cardboard counter nonsense you get in other games. Even if you're a clumsy painter, you can get these models to look good with a bit of drybrushing, though they look fine unpainted. If you recoil in horror at the idea of playing with unpainted models, then you probably have too much free time.

Taking a leaf out of *Fantasy Flight's* book, there are also plenty of fiddly (and not really needed) counters for tracking spell effects and the other clutter of gaming. They come in handier as you get into the game, of course. The dungeon tiles themselves are a little on the fiddly side, and it's scaled and

modular; be prepared to spend some time setting up each game until you get used to the tiles. They could do with being in heavier card stock, but we at the Secret STARBURST Thunderdome tend to be heavy-handed types, so most people should be fine.

As with *HeroQuest*, players have the old mainstay classic roles to take on: Barbarian, Wizard, Elf, or Dwarf. A fifth role is Necromancer, or to put it another way, someone has to be dungeon master and be responsible for all the monsters. As the name implies, the main baddies are the undead. Don't worry though, there are plenty of nasties in the range of undead creatures, all the better to smash the heroes with.

The Necromancer has a deck of cards that allows them to play nasty tricks on the players. Let's say you and your jolly chums break into a dungeon and smash some skeletons. Odds are you'll reduce them to a pile of bones and then start looting the treasure chest. Then the Necromancer plays a card and suddenly, those bones reknit themselves and stand up again. Suddenly, you're outnumbered by the dead. You'd better pray you can lob a fireball in and run. Or maybe the Dwarf will use his special power and stand steadfast, practically immune to damage (for a short time) while you flee. Or maybe the Barbarian will go nuts and take them all out. Regardless, you're always up against it in *Dungeon Saga*, as the dead come back time and time again. Work together and think ahead, or join the Necromancer's undead horde.

Rules-wise, they're pretty simple. It's 'everyone takes a turn', but because it's mostly a team game, you tend to pay attention to everyone's turn, rather than just wait for your own. Combat resolution is 'both sides roll dice and compare like for like', similar to *Risk*. There isn't much in the way of nuance here; the game is designed for quick play and an arcade-like feel. In fact, during play we often quote retro game *Gauntlet*, it's that sort of thing.

The campaign that comes in the box is similarly straightforward. Clearly,



## Gearing up for the UK Games Expo Awards

As regular readers may have gathered, the STARBURST Table Top gaming team is going to be at the UK's most important gaming event of the year, The **UK Games Expo** at the Birmingham NEC (and nearby Birmingham Metropole). We'll be there for the entire thing, held from June 3rd to June 5th.

It's a huge event filled with stalls, games, demos, panels, tournaments and the like. If you've wanted to try the sort of things you can find in this column, then you'll be able to find it at UKGE. It's also a great event for aspiring games designers, with panels and competitions available for such creative types, as well as international tournaments for those of us who like prizes.

Speaking of prizes, the **UKGE** will also be hosting its own award ceremony.

The Expo Awards were developed and introduced at **UK Games Expo** in 2007 to recognise the achievement of manufacturers and publishers in a variety of game genres. A special panel of judges will be assembled to ponder the nominees. The categories are very, very comprehensive: Miniatures Ranges and Accessories both get their own award. As for games, all varieties: board, RPGs, party, children's, family, abstract, and card all get their own section.

Nominations are still open at the time of going to press, so if you're interested in your favourite game winning, it is well worth going onto the website and finding out how you can get involved. You can also volunteer to become a part of **UKGE** on the website, so check it out.

The **UK Games Expo 2016** takes place on June 3rd to June 5th, and tickets are on sale now from [ukgamesexpo.co.uk](http://ukgamesexpo.co.uk).

Mantic want you to buy extra boxes of game, or more likely want you to come up with your own campaigns. This is old-school fun; it's not meant to be difficult, it's meant to be enjoyable and it does that very, very well. This also makes it an ideal way for old gamers to introduce people into the flat-out fun of dungeon crawling.

If you have fond memories of *HeroQuest* or similar games, I'd love to hear them. Until next time, keep fighting those monsters.

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# WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM  
AROUND THE WEB  
THIS MONTH WITH  
JACK BOTTOMLEY

## ALL HAIL THE (MA)KING!

This issue's Emporium has been overruled by all things Westeros, as we celebrate the newest in HBO's series based on the books of George R. R. Martin. Yes, **Game of Thrones** is back, as Season Six is on screens now/starts April 25th (depending on when you are reading these pages). So we ask first and foremost, what is a show called **Game of Thrones** without a bloody big chair? Well outside of constructing your own huge throne, this **McFarlane Construction Throne Room Set**, available at [hboshopeu.com](http://hboshopeu.com), is as close as you can get to bringing the show's throne room into your own living quarters. The set is completely buildable - bricks, pillars and all - with included figures of a Kingsguard and his smarmy grace (don't tell him we said that) Joffrey of House Baratheon and Lannister, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, and Protector of the Realm (and all that jazz). It is a set fit for a king and will look great on any aspiring ruthless royal's mantelpiece.

Speaking of buildable, though, should you not fancy going all Laurence Llewelyn Bowen and bringing a throne room into your home, you can show what side you are on with these House Lannister/House Stark Banner Packs that also feature on HBO's official shop. Looking quite epic on your shelf, these constructible banner packs each come with two figures, a banner with the chosen family crest and sigil, as well as a detailed base boasting that house name and - this is the real selling point - customisable weeds and dirt... what, just because we are a cult entertainment magazine, we can't enjoy a little figurine gardening?

**GAME OF THRONES MCFARLANE CONSTRUCTION  
THRONE ROOM - £38.99**

**GAME OF THRONES MCFARLANE CONSTRUCTION  
STARK BANNER PACK - £12.99**

**GAME OF THRONES MCFARLANE CONSTRUCTION  
LANNISTER BANNER PACK - £12.99**

**ALL AVAILABLE FROM HBOSHOPEU.COM**



## STARKING MAD

A major appeal of House Stark is the direwolves, and they have made for numerous emotional moments in the show. So bring your own pup into your house with this cuter-than-words direwolf pup plush toy, which HBO Shop rightly suggests will 'help you recall those happy days when all the Starks were together at Winterfell and the direwolves were just whelpings.' Alas, if you are made of far tougher stuff and cuteness comes secondary to pride and courage, then you may instead opt for this statue/book set from [runningpress.com](http://runningpress.com). As well as a book penned by Robb Perlman, we have a small statue figurine that depicts the direwolf stone sigil of House Stark, which guards the entrance to the crypt at Winterfell. That'll look great in the office, next to our signed picture of Jon Snow, er, moving on...

**GAME OF THRONES DIREWOLF PUPPY GREY WIND  
PLUSH - £18.90  
AVAILABLE FROM HBOSHOPEU.COM**

**GAME OF THRONES STARK DIREWOLF - \$9.95 USD  
AVAILABLE FROM RUNNINGPRESS.COM**





## NAME OF THRONES!

When it comes to **Game of Thrones**, there can be many a debate about what side you are on. Are you sticking with Stark? Loving Lannister? Trailing Targaryen? And so on. Well, for all you diplomats out there who refuse to resort to violent debates over your favoured house, **beltsbucklestees.com** have you covered... literally in this case. This T-shirt features seven of the major house emblems on one shirt, meaning you can literally represent all (well, most, as not all the houses are there), while all your mates are warring for house supremacy. There's something to be said for being neutral; hell, you might survive for more than a season that way!

**GoT T-SHIRT HOUSE CRESTS - £15**  
**AVAILABLE FROM BELTSBUCKLESTEEES.COM**

## EXCUSE US WHILE WE WHIP THIS OUT

Anyone who says 'the pen is truly mightier than the sword' may fare poorly in Westeros, because anyone who's worth their metal (no pun intended) carries a sword. So if you don't currently have one handy, **hboshopeu.com** has the answer, in this Longclaw collectable sword kit. Featuring a 4" replica (hey, we never said a big sword is mandatory, don't judge) of the sword swung by fan favourite Jon Snow (played by the much adored Kit Harington), as well as a 48-page book about the Night's Watch, this set is an affordable treat for the weapon-loving **Thrones** fan.

**GAME OF THRONES LONGCLAW COLLECTIBLE SWORD MINI KIT - £7.99**  
**AVAILABLE FROM HBOSHOPEU.COM**



## GAME OF HOMES

Usually when it comes to deciding what house you are in, many would respond with detached, semi-detached, or bungalow. However, in George R. R. Martin's Westeros, the response is more likely to be Stark, Tyrell, or Baratheon. We scoured the HBO Shop to find the finest homeware and furnishings fit for a Lannister.

## GAME OF THRONES NOTEBOOKS AND JOURNALS

When you enter a plush study or hip office you can never help but notice marks of quality such as a Moleskine notebook or a leather-clad Filofax. But, how about when planning your next strategy meeting to use social media to get more White Walkers to follow you, instead bring out a Valar Morgulis notebook featuring the famous white door on the front inscribed with the ominous phrase and Valar dohaeris on the reverse. It's a very classy looking thing with some beautiful production images from the television show on the inside front and back covers. HBO Shop also offers a Lannister & Stark notebook, which upon first inspection looks like a normal high quality notebook, but press the corner of each notebook and their house emblems glow with hidden lights. It seems stationary as well as faces can change in the world of Westeros.

**GAME OF THRONES LANNISTER OR STARK ILLUMINATED NOTEBOOKS - £14.99**  
**VALAR MORGULIS HARDCOVER RULED JOURNAL - £13.00**



## WESTEROS MAP WOODEN COASTER

Chuck out your old coasters with pictures of your dead granny on, or some niece or nephew who just costs you too much at Christmas and instead, replace with these wooden Westeros map coasters. They're made out of great wood, they're thick and they're durable. Need we say any more?

**WESTEROS COASTER - £9.99**

## TYRION AND DRAGON GLASS POSTER

We weren't sure about this one until it arrived in the office. At first, you might think, do I need posters in my castle? But this high quality image encased in tempered glass (with hangings included) is quite spectacular. We also think it's a bargain price, too and it would sit beautifully in a contemporary home or even above a fireplace.

**TYRION & DRAGON GLASS POSTER - £17.99**

## CUSHIONS

We've always thought the Throne of Swords looks a little uncomfortable. Fortunately, HBO Shop have created some truly plush pillows fit for a king or queen.

**NORTHERN WESTEROS MAP THROW PILLOW - £28.99**

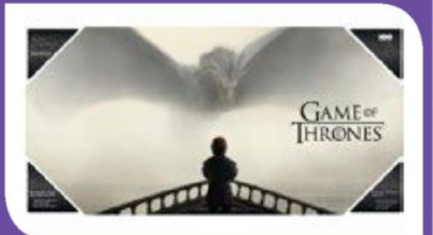
**HOUSE LANNISTER LION THROW PILLOW - £34.99**

## DRAGONS' EGGS!

These are, hands down, our favourite goodies from the HBO Shop. Perhaps having Game of Thrones emblems and characters decorating your home isn't your style. In that case, these beautifully made paperweights sit perfectly on any desk or workstation. Designs available as Rhaegal, Drogon and Viserion.

**GoT DRAGON EGGS - £35.99**

**ALL AVAILABLE FROM THE HBO SHOP - HBOSHOPEU.COM. AK**





# PAUL MOUNT'S



## A Marvel-lous month as we overdose on DAREDEVIL and live to tell the tale and are thrilled by the delightful derring-do of AGENT CARTER...

Come closer, my pretties. Closer still. That's close enough, get back... Let's talk about binge-watching, you and me, and maybe consider some of its pros and cons. Having been born and bred in the 'Olden Days, when all this was just fields, I'm still struggling to come to terms with the idea of binge-viewing. I'm used to the old way of enjoying my telly – sitting down and watching a series week after week, an episode at a time, the way nature (and the programme makers) intended. I never really bought into box set culture either, cracking open a DVD collection and ploughing my way through twenty-odd episodes of some must-watch drama over a weekend. Reasons? Well, I have a very short attention span... *look, a squirrel!*... and the thought of bolting myself into a chair and gorging on one series, day after day means I have less time to do all the other things which bring me joy, such as watching other TV programmes. Note to self: investigate this thing called 'outside' occasionally.

But sometimes even I, groaning old dinosaur that I am, have no choice but to embrace the 21st century and go with the flow. The 'flow' has of late been the second season of Netflix's superhero sensation **Daredevil**, dumped and streamed online *en bloc* last month, ready to be devoured in one big gulp by its voracious fans. My gulps were rather more dainty – a handful of episodes at a time across a couple of weeks – and yet again, I'm rather pleased I took a bit longer than many who, I hear, snaffled up all thirteen episodes within forty-eight hours.

*How do they do it? Don't they eat?*

**Daredevil** is an extraordinarily series, of course, and I can entirely understand the desire to watch episode after episode; it's addictive, compulsive, and highly watchable; even I found it hard to resist the lure of *just one more*. But now, having digested all thirteen episodes of Season

Two (and I'm still processing them), I'm not so sure that binge-watching is necessarily the way to go with **Daredevil**. This is a dense, dark, labyrinthine series, full of twists and turns, dark-as-night storylines, complex character arcs and narrative nuances; I suspect that many of those who shovelled episode after episode into their brains in an over-excited rush will have missed much of its light (what little there was of it) and shade and will need to go back and watch it again at a more measured pace when they realise just how much of it that they actually overlooked the first time. But to be honest, revisiting **Daredevil** Season Two is likely to be only marginally less gruelling than watching it for the first time...

**Daredevil's** sophomore run is a big, bold, brash and uncompromisingly brutal batch of episodes. Blind lawyer Matt Murdock, who is now beating up the

bad guys whilst ensconced in a pretty close approximation of the comic book costume (*"It's not underwear...underwear is comfortable"*), is relishing his growing reputation as 'the Devil of Hell's Kitchen'; dispensing his own brand of street justice to the city's sleazy drug dealers, gangsters and assorted ne'er-do-wells. Matt and his professional partner Foggy Nelson, as well as their 'legal secretary' Karen Page are struggling to establish the freshly minted Nelson and Murdock law firm, but their lives – and the lives of everyone in 'the Kitchen' – are to be rocked by the arrival of a new (and rather more ruthless) vigilante who is set on exterminating all the new criminal gangs that have stepped into the void left by the downfall of Wilson Fisk in Season One. Enter Frank Castle, quickly dubbed The Punisher, who takes no prisoners and is virtually a one-man killing machine, slaughtering the 'scum' who infest the city's seedy underbelly. **Daredevil** and The Punisher clash remarkably quickly – they're trading punches by the end of Episode One – but as the series wears on it seems that the unhinged Frank, driven to the edge of sanity by the death of his wife and kids – caught in the crossfire of a misjudged gangland sting – might turn out to be the least of **Daredevil's** problems. Matt's exotic former squeeze Elektra Natchios (Élodie Yung) is back on the scene; she's a manipulative, wily, and deadly assassin who still exerts a powerful influence over Matt, despite his growing attraction to Karen, who remains, perhaps mercifully, blissfully unaware of Matt's nocturnal superhero shenanigans. Then there's the growing threat of a dark-hearted criminal gang known as The Hand with its army of silent Yakuza warriors and also the mysterious 'Blacksmith', the shadowy mastermind whose activities are, in many ways, directly responsible for the creation of the Punisher. Throw in a return engagement from Stick, Matt's blind mentor and a few other faces from the past (spoilers!) and you've got a heady, richly textured stew of characters and



DAREDEVIL





DAREDEVIL

storylines that, I still contend, is just too much to take in properly and assimilate if consumed in a couple of intense sittings.

Netflix's 'street level' superhero series are, of course, designed to be a somewhat darker and more adult take on the genre popularised by the hugely successful Marvel Cinematic Universe. There are no magic hammers, whirling shields, or super-powered flying suits of mechanical armour here; Daredevil, like Jessica Jones, is a tough street-fighter and his adventures, while extreme, are shot with a gritty, pitiless earthiness that is never more apparent than in its relentless violence. **Daredevil** Season Two takes its violence to a new level of carnage and I sincerely fear for the psychological wellbeing of anyone who can endure thirteen episodes of this frankly extraordinary brutality in a row. Virtually every episode is studded with lengthy, beautifully choreographed fight

sequences, but these aren't the sock-pow fisticuffs of your traditional superhero franchise. Now, I like a good fight as much as the next man (not in real life, I hasten to add... that's not an invitation to take a swing at me should we ever meet), but the fights here are savage, brutal, and occasionally ugly. It's not enough that the Punisher and Daredevil should knock the living daylight out of each other, we've also got the Punisher machine-gunning rooms full of mobsters in graphic detail, Elektra slicing, dicing, and skewering and extended, almost fetishistic scenes where the body count becomes practically immeasurable as faceless thugs are torn open, dismembered, and disembowelled. Daredevil remains the beacon of sanity amidst all this bloodletting, battling to keep up his own 'no killing' mantra as all around him are mercilessly slaying almost anyone with a pulse. No-one is safe; cops, nurses, prison inmates, terrified

innocents – they pretty much all end up swimming in pools of their own blood. The mayhem goes on episode after episode and by about the tenth instalment, I was willing it all to end and for Daredevil, Elektra, and The Punisher to sit down with a nice cup of tea and watch a couple of episodes of **The Big Bang Theory** just to provide some relief from the endless butchery and bloodshed. The Punisher's involvement was always going to make this a harsh and bloody season – and in Jon (**The Walking Dead**) Bernthal, fans finally have a cold, tormented, single-minded Punisher they were craving throughout a succession of increasingly lame feature film versions of the character. But Daredevil's world is pitch-dark and ruthless, and it's hard to imagine that a future series – or any of the other Netflix shows – can get this dark again and I'm really not sure they should even try.

Elsewhere, though, and notwithstanding the eye-watering violence, this is a visually stunning, intricately detailed production, stylishly realised and magnificently directed (a couple of episodes are the work of **Doctor Who** alumni Andy Goddard and Euros Lyn) and on screen, Charlie Cox is astonishing as both Matt and Daredevil, and Elden Henson is solid support as Foggy Nelson, coming into his own in the show's engrossing courtroom sequences. Deborah Ann Woll is formidably feisty as Karen Page, even if her dogged support of the kill-crazy Punisher is a little hard to stomach given that she's all too aware of what he does, regardless of any sympathy she may have for why he does it. There are, however, a few problems inherent in some of the storytelling, which can't help but strain its credibility, even in a series torn from the pages of a comic book. TV and film dramas often play fast and loose with legal procedure, but the very idea of the trial of a psychopath charged with nearly forty brutal murders being rushed



DAREDEVIL



into court in under a week is beyond ludicrous and (untrained) legal secretary Karen Page makes the transition to (utterly untrained) journalist with her own flash desk and everything with remarkable ease – and without ever having written one single word. Nice work if you can get it.

Freed from the Network TV requirement of pesky ad breaks every ten minutes, **Daredevil** (and, indeed, all streaming original dramas) can take their time and spread their wings; many of these episodes clock in at around an hour and they really don't need to. Every episode boasts at least one long, drawn-out talky sequence that really does nothing except restate what we already know and hammer home various character conflicts and relationships. Some episodes do tend to drag a little (despite all the killing and fighting) when the story could quite easily have picked up the pace and avoided the occasional sense of bagginess.

So what next for **Daredevil** in the surely inevitable Season Three? Some characters have moved on, others have passed on and there's an intriguing cliffhanger that suggests a new direction for the characters should they be allowed to come out to play again. Despite some slightly big girl's blouse-style reservations, I thoroughly enjoyed and admired **Daredevil**; it's brilliantly realised and staggeringly well conceived. But to get the most out of it – indeed, to get the best out of it – if you haven't already taken the plunge, you might do well to take your time and take it slowly.

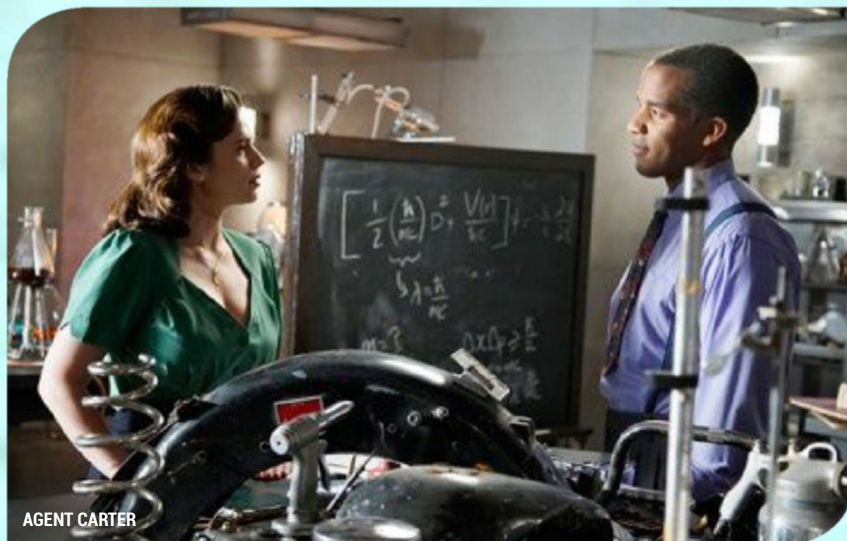
## AGENT CARTER

One of the best recent shows you've probably not been watching is surely the sunnier flipside of Netflix's mean 'n' moody **Daredevil**. The second season of the joyously entertaining **Marvel's Agent Carter**, starring Hayley Atwell as the ballsy post-War secret agent for an embryonic S.H.I.E.L.D.-like organisation called the SSR (Strategic Scientific Reserve) has recently finished screening on Fox in the UK and, in many ways, it was even more

delightful and shamelessly enjoyable than last year's initial eight-episode run. The breezy second season (ten episodes this time) sees Peggy Carter shipped off to Los Angeles to investigate a mysterious murder where the victim has been found frozen solid – in the blazing heat of the Californian sun. Before long, the fearless Peggy, still accompanied by the debonair Howard Stark's fussy butler Jarvis (James Darcy) is battling the usual motley collection of spies and gangsters and, in time, crossing swords with Hollywood starlet Whitney Frost (Wynn Everett) who, in circumstances too complicated to recount here, has come into possession of/become possessed by a specimen of churning, broiling, pitch-black 'zero matter', which can not only open a portal to another dimension but can, if unchecked, bring about the end of the world.

**Agent Carter** is an uplifting adventure; it's great fun, its faultless production values and snappy scripts effortlessly evoking the 1940s setting (although I'm not entirely convinced that Peggy referring to someone as 'an obnoxious plonker' is entirely period-accurate). Peggy is a female hero for all ages; she's smart, sassy, she can handle herself in a fight (and there are plenty of fights – fortunately, none of them are quite as eye-wateringly visceral as **Daredevil's**) and she's frequently one step ahead of all her male chums, who struggle to keep up with her.

This is a series packed with wit, sweet romance, invention, and clearly everyone involved is having a whale of a time. The action is pure comic book, recreating on the small screen the style and spirit of the Marvel Cinematic Universe where we first met Peggy. The clever, well-paced scripts are full of sly gags and visual tics, warm and likable characters all suffused with a real sense of post-War euphoria and populated by black-hatted baddies, megalomaniacal villains, and larger-than-life fanciful gimmickry. The show embraces its more sci-fi storyline and it's a much more confident and kick-ass series than last year's run, which was already a breath of fresh air.



AGENT CARTER

## ALSO SCREENING



### GAME OF THRONES

Season Six. Little-known fantasy saga full of, according to new star Ian McShane, "tits and dragons", based on the sprawling and apparently endless story written by George R. R. Martin. Expect more... well, tits and dragons...

From April 25th on Sky Atlantic.

### 12 MONKEYS

Season Two. The second run of the surprisingly watchable TV 'reimagining' of Terry Gilliam's classic time-travel feature film.

From April 27th on Syfy.

### PENNY DREADFUL

Season Three. More lurid blood and thunder/blood and guts horror in Victorian London, powered by an extraordinary performance from Eva Green, who occasionally keeps her kit on.

From May 3rd on Sky Atlantic.

Sadly, the future doesn't look all that bright for Agent Carter. Ratings have been uninspiring and Hayley Atwell is apparently already committed to **Conviction**, a new pilot for ABC although 'inside sources' have insisted that her schedule doesn't necessarily preclude her participation in future adventures for the redoubtable Peggy. Frankly, however, it looks as if ABC are more interested in keeping Hayley on their roster rather than her Marvel alter ego. It's both frustrating and surprising that, post-**Buffy**, it's still hard to get an audience to engage with a superhero-style series featuring a female lead character (or maybe the period setting just doesn't appeal to a modern iPad-obsessed audience). There's clearly still a lot to be done. But even if we've seen the last of Agent Carter on screen, we know from her appearances as a more mature woman in films like **Ant-Man** that Peggy will endure to enjoy more magnificent adventures. It'd be such a tragedy if we're not around to witness them... +

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# it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE



**STARBURST's Martin Unworth (left) and Andrew Pollard (right) dicking about in front of Rude Tube's Alex Zane at the *Batman v Superman* premiere**

**W**ell, they say that a week is a long time in politics, and definitely this week has been pretty eventful at **STARBURST** Moonbase Alpha. What follows is a tale of wish fulfilment, spectacular misfires that double down, and a few dubious Monks - As **STARBURST** steps things up a few gears...

Anyone that has listened to the **STARBURST Radio Show**, or read this column for any protracted period would probably be more than aware that I have always had a real passion for getting my hands on a cinema. I think anyone who has a passion for cinema has probably always at least wondered about the possibility. Some of us can at least satisfy this desire with the placebo that is Home Cinema equipment. A few quid, a trip to **Richer Sounds** and then you're a set of curtains and a few secret masturbators away from nirvana. To placate the hunt for my dream cinema, myself and the rest of the **STARBURST** gang decided over a year ago to begin planning the **STARBURST International Film Festival**. Happily, we managed to sign off on this event at the beginning of the week leading up to the printing of this very issue.

So what is the **STARBURST International Film Festival**, and why should you get involved and join us there?

taking place in a cinema. A beautifully curated film festival by day and a riotous party by night, we want this to become the ultimate summer celebration for film fans. A shared cultural experience, and a mecca where fans of cult entertainment can get together and have a blast. Starting with the launch party on Friday, culminating in the official **STARBURST Awards** held on Sunday evening, and then ending with the post-coital fag we can all share together that is the wrap party; we will give everyone a weekend pilgrimage that they will look forward to each year.

Seriously, the venue for this festival is perfect. The **SU Complex** is an audio visual palace. Home to an amazing range of spaces that will allow us to host up to four simultaneous screenings and associated events (including a main theatre seating 600 people). Not only will there be lots of screenings and events across three floors, there are bars, coffee shops, and the site even incorporates the legendary **Salutation Public House** (which won't be very public that weekend, as we have hijacked it for you guys!). We aim to make this both a celebration of genre and of **STARBURST Magazine** itself. Our remit is to celebrate everything **STARBURST Magazine** has done since 1977: sci-fi, fantasy, horror, cult. From the biggest blockbuster to the most niche indies, via the very best of the small screen. Cult

Ok. Here we go. We have secured the brand new **Manchester Metropolitan University Student Union Complex**, close to Manchester City Centre for the entire bank holiday weekend from Friday 26th to Sunday 28th August 2016. We are going to make it an urban getaway for genre fans looking for way more than a set

of screenings

classics, retro revivals, new releases, filmmaking and industry-specific events will all be in full flow, together with activities specially tailored for families during the Saturday daytime session, plus signings and photo ops, Q+As with industry legends, evening entertainment and crazy cosplay fun.

The **STARBURST International Film Festival** is a seriously great way to spend this August bank holiday weekend with myself, Martin, Shauna, and the rest of the **STARBURST** crew. Accommodation is literally across the road (included with full weekend passes), and you can simply stay here with us all weekend, and let us entertain you. We will be putting up details as there emerge on [starburstmagazine.com/filmfest](http://starburstmagazine.com/filmfest). As we go to print, I can reveal that we have our first guest confirmed and it's the legend that is Bond director John Glen. Obviously, the fact that a five times director of James Bond movies is on hand for the weekend is a joy for a Bond nut like myself. So pencil in Friday 26th - Sunday 28th of August 2016, and join John Glen and a host of others for our biggest event ever.

So the beginning of the week started pretty well, but then myself, Martin, and Andrew 'Polly' Pollard headed off to London for the premiere of **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**. Again, long-term readers or listeners to the radio show would be aware that there is a history behind this one going all the way back to issue 391 where I took a chainsaw to **Man of Steel** in this very column. Sadly, I was preaching my thoughts to a receptive choir as the Nolan/Snyder lovechild suffered a staggering second week drop-off of over 60% as people reacted badly to a pseudo-hero that was seen turning his back on wholesale death and destruction.

Now we all know that the reaction was swift and immediate. **Man of Steel 2** was transformed overnight into **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**, as DC scrambled to get back on track...

Before the screening, there was more good news to be had. Last time I was in the smoke with Martin Unsworth, we took in some first-person drone flying at a season preview of **Killjoys**, and nearby was a bar, with Monks, called **Belgo** in Covent Garden. Feeling that said monks





TOP MONK

may be less than authentic, my friend and colleague decided that it was not for him, and we returned home monkless. Monks are really good and this was a shame. For purposes of transparency my favourite monks are the ones from *The Final Conflict: Omen III*.

Now this time around, I like to think that he had realised his need to see these monks, or alternatively was sick of me going on about them – so we went. There were indeed monks serving us wine, beer, and spit-roast chicken. Unfortunately, I do agree that the fact that they had a logo on their robes was not what I was expecting, and none of them were clutching the daggers of Megiddo. Then a gentleman in red robes appeared and began to exude authority over the other monks. We wandered over and I asked if he was the top monk. He confirmed that he was. Just like the Daleks, these monks had a colour coded hierarchy. The discovery of the Top Monk was indeed the high point of our trip down south to one of the most highly anticipated premieres we had ever attended (although Martin did get to rub shoulders with *Rude Tube*'s Alex Zane, but stopped shy of stalker behaviour). The presence

of Alex Zane nearby was indeed the bad omen you would expect it to be.

**Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**, whilst on a superficial level seeming to be more enjoyable to watch, ultimately manages to confound my low expectations and is actually a worse movie than *Man of Steel*. In itself, *Man of Steel* was a pretty tight enough movie, with some good performances, and a cohesive narrative. It was just unfortunate that for myself (and seemingly many others who later formed a chorus), the character of Superman was just off. I didn't like this take on the character that was so detached from the source material that it was a tough watch for me. Supes himself was a bit of a tosser. It was a misjudged revision, and even a few scenes of him rescuing anyone during the carnage in the final act would have easily assuaged some of the bad vibe I took away from this. It is astounding to me that whilst attempting to perform some damage control on the fan backlash to the earlier instalment, *B v S* had actually managed to double down and upset fandom even more with yet another dark joyless DC parable that feels at times as though entire scenes are simply missing.

*B v S* is a badly made movie. It's a film I had to watch again before writing this as with its overlong runtime of 2hrs 31 mins, I literally assumed I had nodded off due to the wine dispensed with alacrity by Top Monk. Seems I had not and indeed massive moments occur between scenes that appear on screen. Moments such as Batman having stolen Kryptonite from Luthor happening off screen, after committing the *failed* attempt to celluloid during one of the biggest action set pieces of the film. This invisible storytelling permeates what is yet another soulless and joyless take on a rich and vibrant comic book universe.

I will keep it brief, but there is much to loathe and little to love in this beautiful-looking mess that could have easily been created with an Alex Ross PowerPoint slideshow accompanied by a bunch of drummers afflicted with ADHD. The cast are all solid enough. Amy Adams does her best, Gal Gadot is *interesting*, Henry Cavill is slightly less of a knob (in person at the premiere and on screen), but it is the duo of Ben Affleck and Jeremy Irons as Batman and Alfred who go some way towards recuing this digital brain haemorrhage, but even Irons as Alfred disappears for half of the movie with no explanation. You could also instantly trigger a mass high-fiving session just by asking everyone in a crowded room how annoying Jesse Eisenberg

was in every scene in which he appeared. Why Snyder thought this big slab of psychotic ham was in any way beneficial for anyone to experience will forever remain a mystery. For reference purposes, THIS is when the director is supposed to *have a word* with his overacting, hyperactive star, rather than inflict this twitching irritating twat upon us!

The supporting cast also suffered and were almost ghosts in this operatic opus, with literally nothing to do. The major crime being the criminal way in which Jimmy Olsen, a character second only to Lois Lane in importance to the Supes mythos is introduced only to be killed after two minutes. Yet Jenny Olsen was supposed to be a *Starbucked* replacement for his character in *MoS* and indeed makes an appearance again in the midst of this narrative gas cloud. Proof yet again that this sad old load a bollocks has been cobbled together on the fly.

*B v S* is an angry and depressing watch, bogged down with the weight of its own importance. No-one just talks to each other. Every line is delivered as though it's of monumental importance. Every attempt at humour withers on the vine. A CGI version of Michael Shannon gets more screen time than most of the supporting cast. Bruce Wayne does a *Rocky* montage with tyres, Doomsday is a walking techno festival, and Wonder Woman's over-posed battle scenes could be amusingly YouTube'd to Madonna's *Vogue*, and it's all drowned out by yet another Hans Zimmer audio comb over attempting to hide the lack of real substance. I could go on and on, but what more is there to be said about a film whose climax involves Batman shooting green crystal meth at Supes prior to smashing him over the head with a kitchen sink? A film where the fact that the opponent's mothers share the same Christian name puts an end to this biblical rumble, just as Bats was probably scrambling around for another sink (I wonder if this will be the weapon that comes with the action figure?).

Zack Snyder is in full blown ossification at this moment in his career. Incapable of changing his style or focus. Even when the world rejects it.

As we go to print, *B v S* has managed to beat *MoS* with a 68.4% ticket drop-off in its second week, whilst even Hans Zimmer has announced his retirement from working on superhero movies. Hans, please have a word with your mate Zack. I think you have the right idea...



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 also available from iTunes as a Podcast



Yay. Another two and a half hours of a pissed off Superman



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